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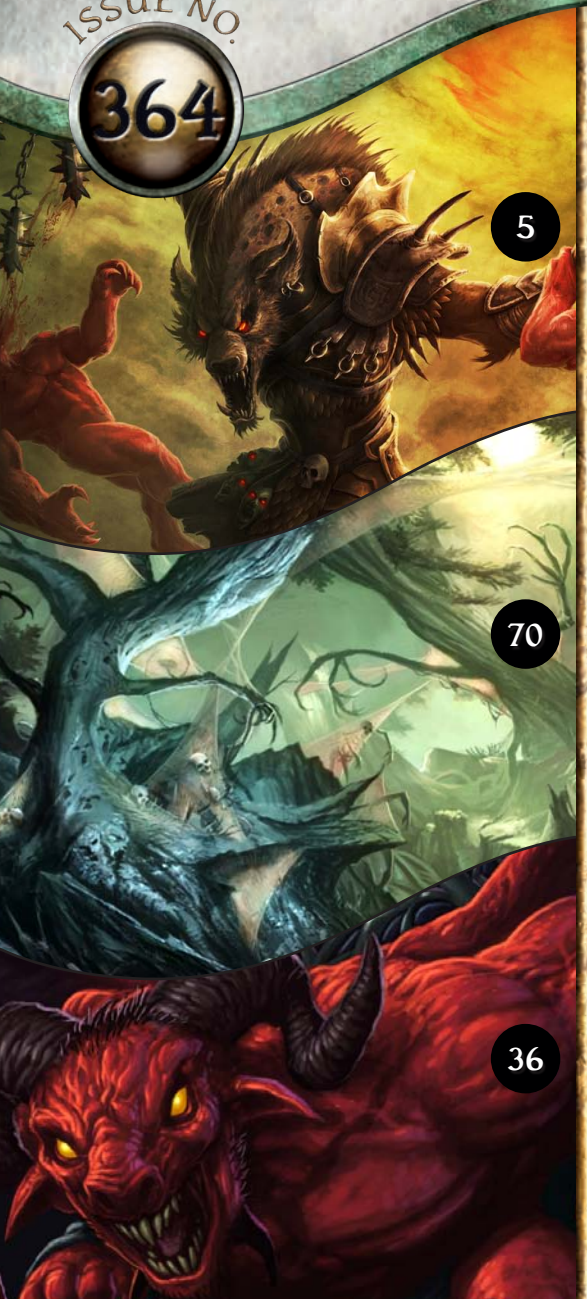

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Same as it Ever Was?

When I was trying to come up with a title for this editorial, I was actually hoping for something more grandiose. More awe-inspiring. More . . . choir of angels-like.

But it seemed more important to emphasize two things in this space. The first is that if you've seen past iterations of *Dragon Magazine,* you should expect to see many familiar elements in this latest iteration—specifically, new articles in each issue that will make your game more fun and more compelling. That means new monsters, new powers, new feats, new magic items, new paragon paths, and new ways to use it all.

You'll see features you've come to love, like this issue's Demonomicon of Iggwilv article on Yeenoghu. You'll see articles that give you new race options for your next character, like "Playing Warforged." And you'll see plenty of familiar designers in our pages (such as Ari Marmell, whose first 4th Edition article is in this issue), as well as new authors (like you, once you've read your 4th Edition core rulebooks).

So why the question mark in the title? If everything's the same—I mean, digital delivery aside—what's new? It turns out, plenty.

The new *Dragon* will be delivered almost entirely in pdf format. (I say "almost" because we'll still put columns up as Web articles as they roll out over the month.) Each week, we'll release portions of the issue—feature articles and columns like this one—until we've released the entire thing. Then you'll get a monthly pdf compilation of the whole issue at the end of the month.

Oh, and did I mention these issues are free? We want you to get a taste of what we're bringing to your table. So for at least a couple of months, we're not charging for a D&D Insider subscription.

Thanks to *Dragon* going digital, we'll be able to more fully integrate all our content. Hyperlinks are just the beginning. We're exploring opportunities to add multimedia options to the magazines—like the "On the Set of 4th Edition" cartoons you've enjoyed in the past few months. Furthermore, all of *Dragon's* content will also be integrated with the D&D Compendium and other upcoming D&D Insider utilities.

We're treating all *Dragon's* content like we do all our printed game supplements. Everything you'll see in these pages makes its way through our experienced, savvy developers, and our story team checks each article for internal continuity, as well. So if you see it in *Dragon*, it's D&D canon like never before.

Perhaps our most exciting change is that we'll be offering our readers the opportunity to playtest new D&D rules before the finished content sees print. Next month will kick off with a new class, and in the fall, we'll be offering up exclusive playtest opportunities for *Player's Handbook II*.

So there it is. We know the past few months haven't quite delivered everything we hoped. But we're confident that with our redesigned, relaunched, fully digital *Dragon*, we'll give you more than enough reasons to keep coming back each week.

Demonomicon of Iggwilv

Yeenoghu, Demon Prince of Gnolls

by Robert J. Schwalb

illustrations by Jason A. Engle and Brian Hagan

There is nothing unique about the wanton violence of the Destroyer. All demons hunger for slaughter, and they all seek the end of all things. They all want to tear down the works of the gods and reduce all things to ruin. Where Yeenoghu differs, however, is in his ability to turn the business of killing into a breathtaking spectacle. With him, it is a form of art—if you can stomach the screams and noxious odors issuing from the dead. Yeenoghu is special because he embodies killing. He has few ambitions beyond the visceral thrill of rending the soft flesh of his enemies and drinking deep the hot blood from their bodies. He craves nothing more than the utter defeat of all those who stand against him and is relentless in his pursuit of feeding the emptiness of his existence with the frantic screams of those he slays. Butchery is the provender of Yeenoghu, and his single-minded pursuit of annihilation makes him a dangerous force in the infinite layers of the Abyss.

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ON A THRONE of bone, in the dim light of smoke-filled hall, surrounded by the sounds of screams and the endless grinding of the wheels far below, sits the Beast of Butchery. Yeenoghu, by those with the courage to address him as such, is a demon prince of the Abyss. As patron of the gnolls, he is worshiped as a god. As kindred to other fiends who carve out their own kingdoms in the Abyss, he is a terrifying scourge, a force of destruction, and a liability to the designs and ambitions of his rivals. Few aside from other more powerful demon lords dare challenge him or the reckless legions clambering to his banners because his forces are nigh unstoppable, and if Yeenoghu's forces could maintain coherency for more than a single campaign, he might have emerged long ago as the true master of the Abyss. As history has shown, though, Yeenoghu is his own worst enemy, and he is frequently the cause of his own undoing.

Description

Yeenoghu combines the worst features of a gnoll and demon in one immense form. Standing 12 feet tall, his body is gaunt and lanky, and patches of yellow fur stained with brown spots cover him. Leprous gray skin and suppurating wounds mar his body, revealing the corruption of his flesh and spirit. His head is a large, anthropomorphic hyena's, with glowing red eyes and a toothy maw from which spills strings of drool.

Always suspicious of treachery, Yeenoghu wears armor assembled from the pieces he scavenges on the battlefield, with bits of mail and plate held together by strips of flesh collected from his victims. His pride is his *Triple Flail*, an evil weapon constructed from the bones of a god he slew during the ancient wars between the deities and the primordials. The handle is a thighbone wrapped in the god's torn flesh. Three chains extend from the top of the handle, each ending in a rusty, barbed head. When used in combat, the weapon bleeds divine ichors, splashing the field with the tears and blood of the fallen deity.

Yeenoghu and D&D

Yeenoghu, like Graz'zt, was one of the creations of the late Gary Gygax for the *Dungeons & Dragons* game, making him one of the first demon lords mentioned in 1st Edition. From the start, Yeenoghu was an important figure, who was described as being "one of the most powerful and feared" of the demon princes. Part of his power stemmed from the fact he enjoyed the worship of the gnolls, and he also enjoyed the support and homage of the King of Ghouls. Jeff Grubb, in the *Manual of the Planes*, implied the demon prince controlled far more than one layer in the Abyss. Of particular note, this book gave us the first look at Yeenoghu's Realm, a barren salt-waste through which Yeenoghu roamed inside his rolling fortress city pulled by legions of slaves under the watchful eyes of gnoll overseers.

Yeenoghu faded from the game for a time during the early years of 2nd Edition. In 1992 he returned to the game in Carl Sargent's *Monster Mythology*. Here, Yeenoghu remained a demon (tanar'ri) lord, and he was also a full-fledged god and member of the "giantish" pantheon. Deemed an interloper god, he was not originally part of the pantheon, but he joined it later when he subverted the gnolls from their god Gorellik. Yeenoghu remained a part of the giant pantheon, but he cared nothing for the giants themselves—he just sought the power he could steal from them as he had from fallen Gorellik.

With 3rd Edition, Yeenoghu's significance began to fade. Although he was still favored by the gnolls, he was no longer their principal god. The coup de grace, so to speak, for Yeenoghu, was the loss of Doresain, the King of Ghouls. *Libris Mortis*, by Andy Collins and Bruce Cordell, revealed Yeenoghu lost the ability to command Doresain, implying either the King of Ghouls had ascended to true godhood (which his rank as demigod supported) or that Yeenoghu had lost so much power he was fast becoming irrelevant. *Fiendish Codex I: Hordes of the Abyss*, by Ed Stark, James Jacobs, and Erik Mona, confirms the latter explanation, describing the Destroyer as a "lesser demon lord," with few ambitions beyond seeing his chosen servants thrive in the world. Even Wolfgang Baur's and Gwendolyn F.M. Kestrel's *Expedition to the Demonweb Pits* portrays Yeenoghu as a minor player in the demonic conclave, his attendance diminished by his peers.

In the 4th Edition rules, Yeenoghu is again one of the few demon lords mentioned in the *Monster Manual*. The Beast of Butchery is the sole master of the gnolls, and packs of these feral creatures roam the world in search of raid, plunder, and victims to sacrifice on their bloody altars. Yeenoghu is still a savage and bestial figure, but he has reclaimed his place among the mighty demon lords. It's just a matter of time before the Beast of Butchery stirs in his fetid realm and brings horrific war to the planes once more.

Yeenoghu **Level 28 Solo Skirmisher**
Large elemental humanoid (demon) XP 65,000

Initiative +24 **Senses** Perception +22; darkvision, low-light vision
Fetid Cloud (**Poison**) aura 5; enemies that start their turn in the aura take 10 poison damage and are slowed until the start of their next turn.
HP 1,290; **Bloodied** 645; see also *bloodied wrath*
AC 46; **Fortitude** 44, **Reflex** 46, **Will** 42
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 variable (2/encounter); see *MM* glossary
Saving Throws +5
Speed 7
Action Points 2

Triple Flail (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +32 vs. AC; 2d8 + 10 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). *Aftereffect:* 15 damage.

Bite (minor; at-will against a target hit by Yeenoghu's *Triple Flail* attack)
Reach 2; +32 vs. AC; 1d8 + 10 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Ribbons of Flesh (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fear**
Reach 2; Yeenoghu makes two melee basic attacks against two different targets. Each hit target takes a -4 penalty to all attack rolls (save ends).

Crushing Grasp (minor; recharge ⚁ ⚂ ⚃) ✦ **Force**
Area burst 2 within 20; +36 vs. Reflex; 3d10 + 10 force damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of Yeenoghu's next turn. *Miss:* Half damage and the target is pushed up to 10 squares.

Filthy Curse (minor; recharge ⚁ ⚂ ⚃) ✦ **Psychic, Necrotic**
Close blast 5; +32 vs. Will; 1d8 + 5 psychic damage, ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends), and the target is stunned until the end of its next turn.

Feint (move; at-will)
Yeenoghu can shift 3 squares. Yeenoghu gains combat advantage against targets he ends his move adjacent to until the end of his turn.

Hyena Strike
If Yeenoghu moves at least 3 squares from where he began his turn, his attacks deal an extra 3d6 damage.

Threatening Reach
Requires *Triple Flail;* Yeenoghu can make opportunity attacks against all creature within his reach (2 squares).

Teleport (move; recharge ⚀ ⚁ ⚂ ⚃) ✦ **Teleportation**
Yeenoghu teleports up to 12 squares.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Skills Athletics +29, Insight +22, Intimidate +24, Nature +22, Stealth +27
Str 31 (+24) **Dex** 26 (+22) **Wis** 16 (+17)
Con 26 (+22) **Int** 21 (+19) **Cha** 21 (+19)
Equipment piecemeal armor, *Triple Flail*

Yeenoghu's Tactics

A figure of incomprehensible power and possessed with an almost unmatched capacity for violence, the Demon Prince of Gnolls flings himself into every battle. He uses his fearsome *Triple Flail* to tear the flesh from his enemies and leave the mounds of the dead in his wake for his scavengers and hangers-on.

Yeenoghu begins his fights by charging his enemies and lashing them with his nasty weapon. He delights in the mayhem he creates as his weapon flays not only the flesh but also the mind, since the weapon's touch rends their courage and resolve. Yeenoghu never stays in place for long; he's always moving and attacking, and he barks through it all. If faced with several opponents at once, he spews a *filthy curse* in Dark Speech to unman his enemies and leave them vulnerable to his assault.

Yeenoghu might lack the means of flight, but his evil will can deflect aerial attackers. If he faces airborne enemies, he pauses just long enough to wrap his opponent in bands of crushing force and then flings the foe away. The Destroyer retreats when he is injured, imprisoned, or otherwise trapped. Like his rivals, he uses teleport to escape—doing so causes him to brood and plot. When he is ready, he draws up his vast armies to mount a new assault augmented by overwhelming numbers of demons, savage gnolls, and other bestial fiends.

Yeenoghu Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Arcana check.

DC 15: Yeenoghu has many names, and each one reflects another facet of his cruel and savage nature. Most know him as the Demon Prince of Gnolls, but among the gnolls, he is called the Destroyer, and in certain circles and writings, he has been called the Beast of Butchery and the Ruler of Ruin. Yeenoghu is the undisputed master of the gnolls, and through them, he works his evil in the natural world.

DC 20: As a demon lord, Yeenoghu is a vehicle of destruction. Like many demon lords, Yeenoghu was once a primordial, one of the shapers of creation, but was transformed and awakened by the mysterious Chained God believed to lurk at the bottom of the Abyss. As with other demons, Yeenoghu hungers for carnage, but also craves power over his rivals and the gods themselves. To this end, he goads his mortal servants into performing appalling acts of evil in his name throughout the lands. He admonishes his servants to show no mercy in their perpetual war—they must kill all creatures they encounter and take prisoners when the beings can serve as useful thralls.

DC 25: The seat of Yeenoghu's power is a nameless layer deep in the Abyss. Known as Yeenoghu's Realm, it is a wasteland. Much of the area is parched savanna covered in brittle brown grass punctuated by semimobile plants with poisonous barbs and choking tendrils. The skies are a sickening shade of green, and the sun is a bloody red wound spreading its crimson stain across the horizon. Bounding this perilous realm is a vast jungle of gnarled trees with jaundiced leaves and toxic fauna. To the north runs a barren range of brown mountains, which are pocked with mines where the Destroyer's servants struggle to pull priceless ore from the monster-filled deeps. The mountains tumble into a vast sea clotted with flotillas and wreckage. Infested by ghouls, the sea also has cannibals and exiles, who have been driven

mad by their isolation and by the horrors living in the murky water's deeps. In all, Yeenoghu's Realm is a nightmare world of want and suffering, which makes it a place suited to its vile and bestial master.

DC 30: Yeenoghu surveys his realm from atop his fortress city. Mounted on hundreds of stone wheels and pulled by an army of demons, the enormous citadel makes its circuit of the layer, running with streams of blood and filth, and leaving in its wakes the crushed carcasses that fell in its path.

Aspect of Yeenoghu

Rather than stirring up trouble in the middle world, Yeenoghu sends his aspect to deal with his mortal servants. The aspect can appear at the Destroyer's behest, serving as the demon prince's herald or messenger. As well, a select few cultists possess a foul ritual to summon the aspect and bend it, for a time, to their will. Yeenoghu is loath to bestow this power onto mortals and entrusts it only to the most powerful and worthy of his servants.

Description

The aspect of Yeenoghu is a 7-foot-tall demonic gnoll that wears rusted chainmail and wields a three-headed flail, similar to the *Triple Flail* of the demon prince's true form. The aspect has the same glowing red eyes and patchy yellow fur, though where his flesh is exposed, he oozes a foul-smelling ochre slime.

DC 30: The aspect is a sliver of Yeenoghu and possesses many of his personality and physical characteristics. It is, however, a separate entity and for as long as it exists, it can pursue its own agenda. Aspects are bound to serve the priests who summoned them and must abide by any commands given. An aspect can resist if the orders are in some way opposed to Yeenoghu's nature, and when they do, the resulting violence is spectacular.

Aspect of Yeenoghu Level 22 Elite Skirmisher
Large elemental humanoid (demon) XP 8,300

Initiative +20 **Senses** Perception +19; darkvision
Fetid Cloud aura 3; all enemies inside the aura take a -2 penalty to attack rolls.
HP 424; **Bloodied** 212; also see *demonic wrath*
AC 38; **Fortitude** 36, **Reflex** 36, **Will** 33
Resist 20 variable (3/encounter); see *MM* glossary
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8
Action Points 1

Three-Headed Flail (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +28 vs. AC; 2d8 + 9 damage.

Bite (minor; at-will against target hit by three-headed flail)
Reach 2; +28 vs. AC; 1d8 + 9 damage, and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Fetid Breath (standard; recharge when aspect drops enemy to 0 or fewer hit points) ✦ **Poison**
Close blast 5; +25 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 9 poison damage, and the target is pushed 1 square plus ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).

Threatening Reach
Requires three-headed flail; an aspect of Yeenoghu can make opportunity attacks against all creatures within his reach (2 squares).

Feint (move; at-will)
An aspect of Yeenoghu can shift 3 squares. He gains combat advantage against targets he ends his move adjacent to until the end of his turn.

Hyena Strike
If the aspect of Yeenoghu moves at least 3 squares from where he began his turn, his attacks deal an extra 2d6 damage.

Demonic Wrath
When bloodied, the aspect of Yeenoghu gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal
Skills Athletics +24, Insight +24, Intimidate +22, Nature +24, Stealth +23

Str 26 (+19)	**Dex** 24 (+18)	**Wis** 26 (+19)
Con 28 (+20)	**Int** 20 (+16)	**Cha** 22 (+17)

Equipment three-headed flail

Aspect of Yeenoghu Tactics

Yeenoghu's aspect leads the vanguard into every battle, charging ahead of the gnolls and filling them with religious frenzy with his ferocity and viciousness. The aspect weaves through its enemies, whipping its flail about to inflict as many injuries as it can.

Aspect of Yeenoghu Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Arcana check.

DC 25: As a reward for constant and loyal service, Yeenoghu can bestow knowledge of a dark ritual to summon his aspect.

Yeenoghu's Ambition

In the centuries after the war with the gods, the Ruler of Ruin has amassed his armies. His people in the natural world feed his layer with a steady supply of slaves and victims, and his altars run red with the blood of fresh sacrifices. He hungers for vengeance against those who have defeated or thwarted him in the past, craving the chance to destroy his enemies, but the centuries of warfare taught him the value of cunning. Rather than spend his servants in a useless bid to seize the Abyss, Yeenoghu turns his attention to his servants in the natural world. There, he works to empower the gnolls, giving them the strength they need to conquer the whole of the civilized lands and make the world his own. Such a conquest would make him more powerful than any god and thus enable him to mount an unstoppable assault against his enemies, the whole of the Abyss, and, one day, the entire cosmos.

Nezrebe, Exarch of Yeenoghu

Like most demon princes, Yeenoghu has a stable of exarchs to support his efforts on his own layer and see to his interests beyond it. Few exarchs remain for long, since their carcasses are crushed beneath the rolling wheels of his fortress when they invariably fail him. One exarch, though, is the exception to the rule of short-lived servantsNezrebe, the White Knight.

Description

Nezrebe stands 9 feet tall, and he has a straight back, muscled frame, and bright crimson eyes. This gnoll is an albino, with sickening white-yellow fur about his face and covering much of body. It darkens to a filthy brown at his armpits and groin.

Nezrebe disdains most armor, relying on his thick hide and inability to feel pain of any kind to carry him through battle. He wears a few pieces, which he has claimed from creatures he has slain. He wields a mighty bastard sword named *Winnower*, a grotesque weapon sporting the nicks and dings of Nezrebe's many battles, but somehow as razor sharp as a fresh-forged weapon. From *Winnower's* hilt hang a series of rotating charms—trophies Nezrebe has claimed from those opponents he has vanquished recently who were the most difficult to slay.

Although a powerful combatant, Nezrebe fights off a foul consumption that causes him to cough up bloody chunks of his lungs. His master's will allows him to survive—a fact that drives the exarch to greater and more appalling acts of violence to ensure he keeps Yeenoghu's favor.

Nezrebe Tactics

The White Knight surrounds himself with demons and gnoll thralls, using their bodies and strength to enhance his own assets in battle. He surges forward, his host in tow, hammering at his foes with *Winnower*. When damaged, he flies into a rage, using rending assault to punish the enemy. He disdains cowards and spits wads of caustic phlegm at wizards, archers, and similar weak foes.

Nezrebe	**Level 25 Elite Soldier (Leader)**
Large natural humanoid	XP 14,000
Initiative +20	**Senses** Perception +24; low-light vision
Bloodlust aura 3; all allies inside the aura gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls.	
HP 462; **Bloodied** 231; see *savage frenzy*	
AC 42; **Fortitude** 39, **Reflex** 36, **Will** 39	
Immune fear; **Resist** 15 acid, 10 variable (1/encounter); see *MM* glossary	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 7	
Action Points 1	
⨤ **Winnower** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Reach 2; +32 vs. AC; 2d8 + 9 damage, and the target is marked until the end of Nezrebe's next turn.	
⚶ **Bloody Phlegm** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid**	
Ranged 10; +30 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 6 acid damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).	
⸸ **Savage Bite** (minor, when Nezrebe hits with *Winnower*; recharge critical hit)	
+30 vs. Reflex; 1d12 + 9 damage, and ongoing 10 damage (save ends). *Aftereffect:* Target is dazed (save ends).	
⸸ **Rending Assault** (standard; recharge when first bloodied and/or critical hit) ✦ **Weapon**	
Requires *Winnower*; +30 vs. AC; 4d8 + 9 damage, and ongoing 5 bleed damage (save ends) and the target is marked until the end of Nezrebe's next turn.	
Savage Frenzy (free action; when first bloodied)	
Nezrebe makes a melee basic attack against each adjacent enemy.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Abyssal
Skills Endurance +23, Intimidate +23, Nature +24	
Str 29 (+21) **Dex** 23 (+18)	**Wis** 25 (+19)
Con 23 (+18) **Int** 21 (+17)	**Cha** 22 (+18)
Equipment *Winnower*	

Nezrebe Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful History check.

DC 25: Nezrebe is Yeenoghu's favored exarch. He takes his name from his white fur and his decidedly uncouth nature. He has a special hatred for elves and spends his time hunting elves that have been dragged onto his master's layer. Inside Yeenoghu's fortress, Nezrebe has special chambers set aside for tormenting captive elves.

DC 30: When not attending his master, Nezrebe sees to extending Yeenoghu's Realm into the Seeping Wood, a vast forest of foul flora and toxic fauna the Destroyer once ruled. There, Nezrebe leads forays into the wilderness, ousting minor demon lords who would carve out their petty kingdoms while also dealing with spies and agents of his master's rivals. To warn off trespassers, Nezrebe crucifies elf slaves to mark lands under his control and to warn what will happen if he is crossed.

Yeenoghu's Minions

Yeenoghu's Realm is filled with despicable creatures, from packs of feral demonic gnolls to a bevy of cackling demons and bestial fiends. From the remnant ghouls infesting his mountains, to the noxious creepers lurking in the depths of the Seeping Woods, Yeenoghu's Realm is unique in its ability to spawn new embodiments of cruel and savage monsters.

By far, the most numerous of Yeenoghu's minions are those gnolls who abandoned the middle world to find new lives serving Yeenoghu. The gnoll packs are ubiquitous throughout the Dun Savannah, thinning near the shores of the Curseswallow, though they dwell near any shrines or temples to their evil master.

Demons, in all their forms and shapes, make up a close second to the gnolls, though the most monstrous and unpredictable of demonkind call this

layer home. Hordes of evistros claw and fight with each other and anything else they encounter, while barlgura demons move across the plains, smashing and killing as they go. Vrocks roost in the mountain peaks or circle the twisted towers of the few permanent settlements on the layer.

Although Doresain is no longer subject to Yeenoghu's rule, ghouls and abyssal ghouls still lurk in the defiles and slopes of the Screaming Peaks. The ghouls aren't loyal to Yeenoghu, but they have severed themselves from the King of Ghouls, making them an unpredictable lot. From time to time, Yeenoghu has had success in rousing these undead servants, but more often than not, the demonic ghouls prey on the Destroyer's other minions after descending from their mountain lairs in a white-painted tide to crash upon the gnoll tribes.

While most gnolls find their lives cut astonishingly short fighting for the Beast of Butchery, a few claw their way to the top of his armies. Just a handful of gnoll champions ever fight their way free from the sea of violence to gain positions as commanders and advisors. In addition, Yeenoghu keeps a number of courtesans to ravish, kill, and sometimes eat. His insatiable lover and stalwart servant, a filthy gnoll named Rekla, lords over the mix of races and creatures.

Yeenoghu has few allies in the Abyss. None of his peers trusts him, and few respect him. Yeenoghu does have his uses, however, and Graz'zt has maneuvered the Beast of Butchery into terrible battles with surgical precision and great cost to Yeenoghu's own forces. Whether Yeenoghu realizes he's being used or not isn't certain, but it doesn't matter since the Prince of Gnolls needs little excuse to kill.

Yeenoghu deals with lesser fiends, forming alliances when doing so suits his moods. Such arrangements last only as long as Yeenoghu can stomach them and end in a bloody murder, with his ally's entrails spilling to the floor of the Destroyer's palace. In spite of the risks, ambitious fiends seek out the Ruler of Ruin to enlist in his service, some in the hopes of gaining power and status, others plotting to overthrow the savage demon lord and claim his demesne for themselves. Such demons might be selected to serve as exarchs for a time, but rare is the demon that can escape the dark one's wrath.

Yeenoghu's Cult

The greatest concentration of Yeenoghu's mortal servants comes from the gnoll tribes in the world. To them, Yeenoghu is their god and master. The Beast of Butchery was not always worshiped by the gnolls, for long ago these disparate tribes paid homage to a now almost forgotten god named Gorellik, their maker and the patron of hunting, beasts, and the wild. After murdering Gorellik during the ancient wars between the primordials and the gods, Yeenoghu absorbed the fallen god's essence and laid claim to his children, forever after staining the race with his own foul corruption.

Not all Yeenoghu's worshipers are gnolls, however. Any creature capable of embracing the beast within and who exults in killing, butchery, and slaughter can find a common purpose with this terrifying patron. Most nongnoll servants operate alone, performing obscene rituals in the light of the moon and eating the flesh of their living victims raw. A group of likeminded lunatics might gather and establish a small cult, but they soon draw attention, since their violent crimes escalate when gathered in groups.

Yeenoghu is never selective about those he accepts into his cult and has, at best, a mild interest in his servants' affairs. Indeed, many of his servants do not even realize whom they worship. The ceremonies are the same, involving the slow torture of their victims culminating in devouring their living flesh, regular blood sacrifices in moonlight, and an unflinching commitment to slaughtering one's enemies.

Among the gnoll tribes, worship follows certain customs and practices that vary from tribe to tribe. As with the solitary servants, the cultists scour the lands for fresh victims, dragging them back to hidden altars where they are strapped down and mutilated with sharp knives. The blood is collected

and distributed among Yeenoghu's high priests, which they then mix with hallucinogenic herbs and consume with relish.

Another common element is the refusal of cleanliness. Any follower of the demon prince must never bathe and must bask in his own odors, rubbing excrement, blood, and filth into his hide and vestments until he becomes a reeking heap crawling with maggots and disease. The more pungent the stench, the greater the cultist's influence.

Yeenoghu's cults are a chaotic mess. At their cores are cabals of vicious, treacherous leaders who gain their positions by murdering their predecessors in spectacular and gruesome ways. These leaders must contend with rising stars within their own ranks, butchering those showing too much promise and ambition. Thus, the actual number of leaders is small, with the rest of the cultists rounded out by the tribe, who are warriors for the most part.

Yeenoghu has a presence in the world, but has few shrines and fewer temples. His "holy" sites are bloodstained rocks in dark corners of the wilderness. Some include a single, jagged chunk of rock thrusting from the ground and scrawled with crude paintings and blistering curses smeared in blood and feces. When the cult performs a sacrifice, they hold the victim down on the altar while the leader carves off bits of flesh to give to the gathered host of warriors, which produces an incredible frenzy as the gnolls fight and claw to receive the sacrament of their master. The cultists save the viscera for last. Within these dripping organs, they believe they can see visions of the future and commandments from Yeenoghu, so they are careful to inspect each glistening chunk for the secrets they contain.

When the cult performs a sacrifice, they hold the victim down on the altar while the leader carves off bits of flesh to give to the gathered host of warriors.

In Yeenoghu's Realm, the Beast of Butchery enjoys a more formalized following, and each group works in one of the three fortified cities marking the boundaries of his layer. These groups center their activities around grand temples of crimson stone—massive, six-tiered, five-sided ziggurats, darkened by the profusion of flies hovering above the sites. On each side, a broad staircase climbs to the zenith, while the tiers themselves hold gardens of screaming and weeping victims, each tortured and left to die slow deaths. The wreckage of all races can be found here, from orcs nailed to X-shaped frames, to halflings dangling from hooked chains, to wicked cages fitted with long barbs facing inward to penetrate the flesh of the dwarves, humans, and gnolls who occupy them.

Each day, sometime after dawn, Yeenoghu's cultist leaders select a victim from those on display. They draw forth their prey from the contraptions, drag them up the stairs to the bloody altar at the top, and promptly butcher them, tossing the bits of meat to rain down on the victims waiting for their turn at the top.

Cultists of the Ruler of Ruin haven't always been relegated to the fringes of civilization and the filthy reaches of Yeenoghu's Realm, and once, not long ago, they united long enough to mount a credible threat to the established nations in the world. During the height of the last human empire, Nerath, a mortal gnoll known as the White Ruin came to power in his tribe after butchering the chieftain and all his sons in one horrific combat. With the warriors cowed, the gnoll champion swiftly turned to the other tribes stalking the forests and hills, seeking them out, one by one, to challenge their chieftains. Those who fought him died, and those who didn't vowed their service, cementing their alliance with the blood of their firstborn sons. Not long after, the White Ruin

accumulated a horde of gnolls, hyenas, goblins, orcs, and dread demons summoned from the Abyss, and in the name of his wicked master, turned hungry eyes to the lands of humans.

At this time, King Elidyr, a wise and just monarch, ruled the lands of Nerath. When word reached him of the approaching storm, he gathered his glittering knights and allies to meet the demonic host. His forces, although numerous, could not compare to the ravenous beasts under Yeenoghu's banners. Elidyr struck and fell back a dozen times, each loss finding his diminishing army deeper in his own lands, and the gnolls scouring the earth of castle, town, and city. His numerous forays bled the host, racking up appalling numbers of dead, but nothing Elidyr did could halt the tide's progress.

It wasn't until the Battle of Nine Sons, when much of Nerath drowned in its own blood, that Elidyr finally triumphed over the invaders. He and his sons, each bold knights and great champions in their own right, formed a wedge and rode their magnificent charges through the unruly ranks, driving deep to reach its monstrous heart. As they rode, their armies hit the horde from both sides, sacrificing themselves for one final attempt to halt the enemy's progress. Elidyr and his sons fought through the press, each taking grievous wounds and vanishing in the sea of blades, claws, and teeth, until only the king remained, dripping with the blood of his eldest and most beloved son. It was then that the White Ruin sought out this courageous warrior and challenged him to single conflict.

For nine days and nights, while the armies fought around them, Elidyr and the White Ruin fought, hacking and chopping at each other, neither willing to surrender. On and on they battled until the dawn of the tenth day, when the roiling dark clouds broke and the light of the gods shone down upon the embattled forces. The White Ruin, unaccustomed to the wholesome power of the enraged gods, shielded his eyes, giving Elidyr the chance he needed to drive home his shining sword in the black heart of the terrible monster. Just as he struggled to withdraw the blade, the White Ruin loosed a tremendous screech and was pulled, along with the noble king, into the Abyss.

The victory won at the cost of a king and his sons proved bitter, for the destruction the kingdom suffered was too much and its people were too scattered to rebuild. In time, Nerath crumbled like the gnoll host, until it too passed into history. Some whisper, though, that Elidyr is not dead and lives on, fighting Yeenoghu in the Abyss. They feel that one day he will defeat the Beast of Butchery and return to the mortal world, bringing with him a new age of justice and peace as he drives back the darkness overtaking the world.

Zaiden

"His demands are simple: kill. Follow his commands and you shall know blessings beyond your dreams." —Zaiden

Zaiden exemplifies the sort of gnoll who seeks control over more than one gnoll pack. An individual with great ambition and capable of unspeakable evil, she cleaves to a simple reading of Yeenoghu's doctrine and commits herself to tearing down the works of civilization and painting the world crimson with the blood of her enemies. Her success has established an unmatched bond with the Destroyer, enabling her to tap into the raw stuff of the Abyss and bend it to her will. A paragon of the Yeenoghu's evil nature, she is a force of chaos and evil in the land, and many adventurers have met bloody ends at her hands.

Occupation and History

As the leader of Yeenoghu's largest gnoll pack, she is fast becoming the mortal face of all that Yeenoghu exemplifies. Her path was set soon after she was born into this world, which is when she murdered her siblings and devoured the soft flesh of their innards. When she came of age, she butchered her mother as a sacrifice and took her father as her mate until she tired of him,

Zaiden **Level 20 Elite Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid XP 5,600

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +11; low-light vision
Fear and Loathing aura 5; all enemies in the aura take a -2 penalty to damage rolls.
HP 364; **Bloodied** 182
AC 36; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 34
Resist 10 psychic
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8
Action Points 1

Cruel Barbs (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+25 vs. AC; 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Dark Utterance (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fear, Psychic**
Close burst 6; targets enemies; +26 vs. Will; 4d6 + 6 psychic damage, and the target is pushed 5 squares. *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares.

Whirlwind of Teeth (standard; recharge ⚅)
Area burst 5 within 20; targets enemies; +24 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 6 damage, and ongoing 10 damage (save ends).

Yeenoghu's Claws (minor; encounter)
Close burst 3; all allies in the burst gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls until the end of the encounter.

Dark Portents (immediate reaction, when hit by an attack; recharges when first bloodied)
Zaiden gains a +4 bonus to AC and defenses until the end of her next turn.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal
Skills Intimidate +21, Religion +17

Str 20 (+15)	**Dex** 18 (+14)	**Wis** 13 (+11)
Con 14 (+12)	**Int** 15 (+12)	**Cha** 23 (+16)

Equipment *Cruel Barbs*

which was an occasion marked by his execution when she read his innards for the portents they contained. Thereafter, Zaiden eliminated any other cultist seeking to usurp her position until the only ones left were those she personally had instructed in the vile ceremonies and practices of Yeenoghu's blasphemous church.

Physical Description

Zaiden is a large female gnoll who stands just less than 7 feet tall and is possessed of a frame that's nearly all muscle. Stinking yellow fur covers her, except around her mouth and small blue eyes, where the fur darkens to black. She wears filthy brown robes trimmed in yellow fur on the sleeves and around the fringe of the hood covering her head. Cured leather padding covers the shoulders of her robes. All her clothing bears the tell-tale signs of her work—they are spotted with dark blood and reeking of decay, body odors, and excrement.

Attributes and Skills

Zaiden has no better understandings of the intricacies of Yeenoghu's cult than does any other follower in his service, but what she does have is an animal magnetism—a powerful presence that allows her to cow her lessers. When her charisma fails, she's not above using her fanged flail to instruct her followers in the virtues of obedience—often a fatal lesson. Her greatest asset is her arsenal of terrifying magical powers. Calling upon the will of Yeenoghu, she can break demons she binds and rip apart her foes with terrible curses.

Values and Motivations

Born into madness and evil, Zaiden has known nothing other than the bloodlust and carnage her master demands. She sees herself as the mortal extension of Yeenoghu's will and exults in her status, even if it is only imagined. She demands absolute obedience from her minions and is quick to kill any who disappoint her.

Distinguishing Features

Zaiden has a detached manner and a measure of self-control not found in most gnolls. When she's hard-pressed in combat, she reveals the beast within as she drools and barks with insane bloodlust. Ropes of her stinking spittle froth from her lips and broken teeth to spill onto her robes, darkening her already befouled vestments.

Using this Villain

Zaiden could be responsible for any number of plots and developments related to the Destroyer. She craves attention from her master and so she embarks on all sorts of depraved missions to catch Yeenoghu's eye. Although she doesn't want for power or influence, she has yet to receive a visitation from the demon lord, and until she does, she hatches more and more disgusting acts of utter depravity. One day, she's certain Yeenoghu will take her as his bride and she will rule by his side.

Crocotta

Crocottas are unique to Yeenoghu's realm, and they fill a niche similar to that of the hyena in the natural world. These beasts are scavengers that have a brutish cunning and an insatiable lust for killing.

Description

This predator blends the features of a wild boar and a hyena. Black-spotted brown fur covers its head. Large brown, pitted tusks emerge from its canine jaw. The rest of its body is hairless and covered with hideous, crusty sores. It has a long ratlike tail.

Crocotta	**Level 9 Skirmisher**
Medium elemental beast (demon)	XP 400

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +11; darkvision
HP 94; **Bloodied** 47
AC 23; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 20
Resist 5 variable (1/encounter); see *MM* glossary
Speed 8

Gore (standard; at-will)
+14 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage.

Haunting Laughter (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear, Psychic**
Close burst 3; +12 vs. Will; 2d10 + 6 damage, and the target slides 1 square. *Miss:* The target slides 1 square.

Morphic Visage (minor; recharge 4 5 6) ✦ **Illusion**
Close blast 3; +12 vs. Will; the crocotta gains combat advantage against the target until the end of its next turn.

Craven (immediate reaction, when targeted by a power with the fear keyword; at-will)
Whenever a crocotta is the target of an attack with the fear keyword, it shifts 4 squares away from the source of the attack.

Feint
If a crocotta shifts at least 1 square during its turn, its melee attacks deal an extra 1d6 damage.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** –
Skills Stealth +12

Str 19 (+8)	**Dex** 17 (+7)	**Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 14 (+6)	**Int** 5 (+1)	**Cha** 11 (+4)

Tactics

Crocottas use pack tactics when hunting their prey. They then use haunting laughter to put their opponent into harm's way, slashing with their vicious tusks, only to dart away if their foe returns with an attack of its own. The sounds of their queer laughter causes the target to move unbidden, so each crocotta has a chance to tear into the enemy before closing in for the kill.

Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Arcana check.

DC 15: Crocottas are demons of the Abyss found throughout Yeenoghu's Realm. There, they hunt escaped slaves and explorers alike, killing whatever they encounter.

DC 20: The crocotta is a perverse reflection of the natural hyena and employs many of the same tactics. These demons possess a curious bark that sounds like disturbed laughter. Those who hear it move against their will. In addition, crocottas can also twist their features in grotesque forms to shock and frighten their foes.

DC 25: Crocottas are natural cowards and flee any kind of stiff resistance. However, driving off a pack of crocottas doesn't mean that they've given up. Their hunger and hatred wins out over their fear, and they are sure to return until their victim is dead.

Encounter Groups

Most crocottas operate in small packs, and a few demons can break them of their natural independence and use them as guardians and warriors.

Level 9 Encounter (XP 1,950)
- ✦ 1 gnoll demonic scourge (level 8 brute)
- ✦ 4 crocottas (level 9 skirmisher)

Level 11 Encounter (XP 3,000)
- ✦ 1 mezzodemon (level 11 soldier)
- ✦ 6 crocottas (level 9 skirmisher)

Yeenoghu's Realm

Yeenoghu's Realm is a dire place that has all the nastiest elements of the Abyss combined into one region of depthless evil, cruelty, and wanton destruction. For all the creatures dwelling in the Realm, the layer feels empty. Great stretches of savannah lay undisturbed except for the hot wind blowing from the Curseswallows to the east. The mountains are still and quiet until pierced by the occasional shriek of the dying. Even in the vibrant forest of the Seeping Woods, nothing stirs. At night, the layer comes alive, when the hunters emerge from hidden grottos and filthy encampments to hunt. The screams of the slain, wet tearing noises, and the grunts and clashes of combat sound out, and the layer is pregnant with the coppery smell of spilt blood.

Yeenoghu's Realm consists of five broad regions, and all are more or less ruled by the Destroyer. By far the largest is the Dun Savannah, an endless sea of dead grasses punctuated with isolated stands of gnarled trees and dimpled with pools of brackish water. Here the gnolls run the wildest.

The savannah extends north to the foothills of the Screaming Peaks, a jagged range of mountains clawing at the leprous skies. Little more than sharp rocks, slides, and scree, the mountains were once home to the realm controlled by the King of Ghouls. Even in his absence, it remains a dangerous place due to the undead dwelling here still.

The mountains give way to a great expanse of salt-wastes stretching as far as the eye can see. Little lives in these lands, though packs of ravenous ghouls or twisted demonic constructs can survive in these inhospitable wastes. Rumors hold this barren landscape marks the fall of a powerful champion of the gods. In the deepest depths, in a black sea of death, rest the remains of the murdered champion and the salt of the lands are in fact the dried tears of the deities who mourned his passing.

The eastern extent of Yeenoghu's Realm is a yellow sea known as the Curseswallow. Since the waters are poisonous, few gnolls roam its shores and many, in fact, keep their distance because all sorts of terrible creatures lurk just beneath the surface of the ochre water. The Curseswallow is a haven of sorts for those who escape the Beast of Butchery. Flotillas of refugees, exiles, and rebels sail the seas. Foremost of these fleets is the one commanded by the Cannibal King, a ruthless human rogue who captains the *Harvester*. He and his crew pressgang sailors to replace their fallen comrades and to serve as food for when their stores grow thin. The Cannibal King seems content to remain on the Curseswallow, but when he does brave the deeper waters of the Abyssian, his fleet returns swollen with a fresh crop of rotting hulks choked with depraved sailors.

Standing over 600 feet tall and packed with buildings separated by tiny, narrow streets, the entire structure weeps blood . . .

Finally, to the west lies the Seeping Woods. By many accounts, this forest is infinite and spreads beyond Yeenoghu's layer. Here, the gnarled trees grow tall, blotting out the sun with a tangled canopy of vines and yellow leaves. The splitting bark drips green sap stinking of rot. Crawling through the shadows are armies of toxic insects, slithering serpents, and poisonous plants. The Seeping Woods is by name under the control of Yeenoghu, but the Destroyer has had little luck in maintaining a standing presence here because the forest rebels at intrusions and gobbles up those who linger overlong.

Yeenoghu's Realm is mostly untamed and savage wilderness, but a few settlements have survived in spite of the near-constant violence. Tiny logging settlements are scattered throughout the Seeping Woods, each harvesting wood and other materials to supply Yeenoghu's war machine. These encampments never last for long and vanish soon after they are first established. The cost in terms of life and labor is high, but as the sole source of timber on the layer, new settlements arise each month.

Three permanent cities are also in Yeenoghu's Realm. Least of these is Vujak-Riln. A small city compared to the others, it serves as a mustering place to mount new expeditions into the Seeping Woods. Gnoll and demon overseers round up "volunteers" and dispatch them into the forest armed with axes and dire threats. As long as timber comes out of the woods, their masters care nothing for what goes on in these darkened lands.

Vujak-Sesco controls the northern extent of the realm. Behind its 300-foot-tall walls, gnolls, humans, and a bevy of other races toil for Yeenoghu, mining the mountains for iron and other metals with which they fashion the weapons of war. Corpses litter the streets, left where they are fallen to be worried by the jackals and hyenas brazenly stalking the streets.

Vujak-Kesk is the seat of Yeenoghu's cult. Here, his most fervid followers gather to perform awful rites and ceremonies in the name of their master. Blood pits serve to challenge new champions, pitting them against blooded gnolls, ogres, and others, so that the weak are winnowed out and the strong are tempered. Vujak-Kesk is also the point where Yeenoghu gathers his armies to march through the western Gathering Gate, a strange anomaly tying the Realm to numerous other worlds and planes.

Yeenoghu disdains these cities, preferring instead to relax in the stinking throne room of his rolling fortress. Standing over 600 feet tall, ringed by a half-dozen walls, and packed with buildings separated by tiny, narrow streets, the entire structure weeps blood, and effluvia from its gutters and a pall of smoke swirls about it. Demons and slaves labor to pull the monstrosity, while vrocks circle above, cackling as they drop to feast on those crushed beneath its wheels. The fortress makes a circuit through the plane each year to remind the denizens of the realm just who rules here.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb works as a freelance designer for Wizards of the Coast and has contributed design to such books as *Tyrants of the Nine Hells* and *Elder Evils*, and the forthcoming *Forgotten Realms Player's Guide*, *Draconomicon: Chromatic Dragons*, and *Manual of the Planes*, as well as numerous articles for **D&D Insider**. Robert lives in Tennessee with his incredibly patient wife Stacee and his pride of chaotic evil werecats.

The tiefling empire once spanned thousands of miles and served as a testament to the power of its devil-bound overlords. Filled with wonders and terrors the likes of which cannot be imagined by most, the legends about it sleep now. Fell citadels of world-rending might lay broken over the foolish ambitions of their makers. Senseless feuds mixed with opulence and blindness brought the gloried days of their world to a close.

But still, the rumors of the shattered empire persist. Those who believe that the white towers of Arkanast are civilization know little of the vastness of what the tieflings once ruled. The tainted masters of countless empires ruled from Vor Kragal, their seat of power. Vor Kragal pulsed with the terrifying might to break the souls of kings, and its markets flowed with the treasures of a hundred worlds. The secrets of life everlasting and the power to touch the face of the gods were all as commonplace to the tieflings of old as irrigating crops or erecting a simple stone wall is to those living in our current age. The magic of the present is a crude tool when compared to the dance of the elements seen in the past. Such power. For even a glimpse of it, a person might trade his soul. Now, though, the ruins of Vor Kragal are merely an ashen landscape that unknown terrors call home.

–Leatherface Lorand,
veteran adventurer

by Nicolas Logue

Vor Kragal, City of Ash

illustrations by Brian Hagan and Raven Mimura ✦ cartography by Sean Macdonald

THE HELLISH MASTERS of Bael Turath once held control of large portions of the world—both above and below the surface. Their enemies shuddered at rumors of extraplanar holdings that dwarfed even their sprawling empire in the world.

Bael Turath rose to power when the empire of Arkhosia was at its peak, and it was inevitable that the upstart empire would come into conflict with the dragonborn. The war that erupted when these two fearsome powers careened into each other engulfed the entire world. Dragonborn surged into the borders of Bael Turath by the thousands, and the wings of their masters darkened the sky. The devils responded in kind. Hellfire that could sizzle adamantine to slag rained on their foes, ending thousand-year lives in the blink of a succubus's eye. The tainted ones turned the hearts of their foes black with corruption, sparking

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ancient feuds among the dragonborn.

When it was over, the magic worked on both sides was so dire that it tore reality and dreams. No one remembers what happened after the fall, but the glory of Vor Kragal—one of the empire's most impressive bastions of power—was undone. A few of its most impressive citadels survived the desolation, but the rest of the obsidian city was laid to ash.

The nightmares and hellish shades who prowl the ruined city of Vor Kragal don't take trespass lightly. Still, adventurers have been known to seek it out from time to time, lured by tales of Bael Turath's lost secrets, which are mired in the sunken landscape.

A Tale of Three Houses

Vor Kragal was the jewel of the southern tiefling empire and an epicenter of Bael Turath's power in their brutal war against the dragonborn empire of Arkhosia. Of the noble families cursed with infernal blood, three of the most powerful called Vor Kragal home. When their already prodigious mastery of magic was coupled with fiendish pacts with some of the Nine Hells' sinister archfiends, these families transformed the city into an overwhelming wellspring of power.

Jorhara Barikdral *Barathas Kahlir* *Krumos and Kaieta Zolfura*

House Barikdral

House Barikdral, already widely feared and respected for its mastery of the necromantic arts, erected a citadel of blackened bone as the nexus of its power. As the empire was about to fall, the Barikdral locked themselves within it, forever speaking to the outside world through undead servitors and messengers. Before the decline of Vor Kragal, the matron of Barikdral was an unnaturally tall tiefling female with a wild mane of white hair cascading to the ground and even trailing several feet behind her. In the early years of her reign, this vibrant tiefling female often appeared on the pate of a giant's charred skull that she used for a flying chariot. Soaring overhead, the wind blowing her shock-white hair around her, she displayed her august presence daily to the lesser citizens of the empire as a reminder never to challenge House Barikdral. Her name was Jorhara, and her voice was death. She spoke through undead mouthpieces. The sound of one syllable uttered from her rasping throat caused listeners to keel over stone dead and arise as mindless zombies wanting only to follow the honeyed commands of Jorhara's slaying voice. As she grew ancient and withered, she took to wearing clinging black gowns that fit her bony figure, and her fingers grew disturbingly long. Finally she vanished within the Charspire altogether and never emerged again, and she communicated to others only through her rotting envoys.

House Kahlir

House Kahlir created a sprawling, labyrinthine complex of exsanguination chambers and gory pits of sacrifice where its members practiced their blood rites unabated. Dragonborn prisoners of war were marched into this grim maze by the thousands. What fell purpose their spilled blood served is unknown, and even today, those who enter Kahlir's labyrinth never return. The Blood King of House Kahlir at the time of the fall was a grotesquely corpulent vampire tiefling named Barathas, who gorged himself on blood day and night. The demented king dispensed with clothing entirely, which allowed his growing rolls of blood-seeping fat to cover him. His giant pudgy face was dominated by a huge mouth filled with flesh-shearing fangs. His horns appeared tiny

compared to his unseemly girth. The ravenous monster's appetite grew too fast for him to adequately feed himself by conventional means. In his later years he focused his powers to do horrific things to his foes. Ancient texts report he could drink a person's blood from 100 yards away just by casting a hungry glance at him.

House Zolfura

The elemental magic of House Zolfura gained tremendous boons from their new devil patrons. They transformed a large section of the city into a crucible of fire, acid, and ice where no living foe of House Zolfura could pass without being charred and blasted to utter oblivion. What secrets of the cosmos they uncovered within its thrumming halls of power remains a mystery to this day. Zolfura's throne at the end of Vor Kragal's days was shared by a brother and sister, named Krumos and Kaieta. Tales purport their bodies had become imbued with such prodigious and unnatural thermal extremes that if either wandered more than a short distance from the other, they would both explode and take most of the city with them. Some even claim Krumos and Kaieta might be the true cause of Vor Kragal's cataclysm. Kaieta was reportedly a striking tiefling female, noble and full figured, and ever cloaked in white-blue flame of impossible heat. Her brother Krumos was her opposite in every way—a tall impressive tiefling male cloaked in a sheen of opalescent ice. The freezing air around him formed thick chitinlike armored plates of sheer rime, which many theorized could protect him from any weapon.

The Houses Together

The city thrived under the evil guidance of these three houses, and they each erected breathtaking monuments to their hellish power. It didn't take long for the populace to abuse their newfound powers as they descended into unimaginable decadence and engaged in debauchery far beyond most mortals' sickest fantasies.

A civilization at its height is only moments away from a fall. Vor Kragal's gloried years spent reveling in its infernal might was tottering on the precipice of its doom. Though constant sieges laid by the Arkhosian dragon kings did their fair share of damage, in the end, no one knows if a dragon assault or the tireless feuding of the city's three ruling families was the cause of the crushing cataclysm that buried the city of Vor Kragal in ash for thousands of years.

The city is situated in an ashen wasteland now, and thirty years ago an earthquake caused a large portion of Vor Kragal to rise to the surface. Its ascent caused it to slough off layers of volcanic ash. For the first time in millennia, a lost city of the tiefling empire of Bael Turath was exposed to the world around it again.

Ruined Landscape

The once majestic metropolis of the tieflings is now a fractured field of devastation. Still, shades of its former glory and timeless terrors created by the Houses of Vor Kragal still prowl her darkened streets and broken edifices. Many believe the scions of Vor Kragal's three greatest houses perished in the apocalyptic event that turned the city into a tomb ages past, but infernal overseers of history's most powerful empire do not die easy. Evil slumbering for thousands of years now begins to stir. A few adventurers have dared venture to the newly risen Vor Kragal with the hope of plundering its lost treasures, but the soul-shredding terrors that await them are loath to part with the relics of their more gloried age.

From certain vantage points surrounding the broken city, one can take in the entirety of its sprawling wasteland. The Charspire juts from a pit of ash at its center, and running from the eastern rim of the city's crater is the treacherous Vein Maze. The unnatural glow of the Hellforge Crucible casts a red gleam on the Pyramid of Lost Tales even on the blackest of nights. Most of the city still has layers of ash covering it, like a majestic metropolis swathed in the aftermath of a gray blizzard. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions rocked this place thousands of years ago, so whole majestic districts of manors and keeps long ago fell to rubble, broke apart, and were ground to dust. The Upper City is a plateau to the north of the crater, and it rises on a gentle slope of volcanic shelves. The Tower of the Mirror King is the only major edifice remaining on its windswept heights—the sunlight and moonlight cause it to scintillate like a diamond the size of a great mountain.

Hellforge Crucible

This dragon-blasted crater, riddled with the crumbling ruins of what were once majestic obsidian monoliths, was the center of Vor Kragal's war machine. Here furnaces fueled by the hellish fires of the city's industry produced weapons of war unlike any wielded today. Devil smiths fueled their master forges with the souls of the fallen, harnessing unthinkable power into their dread creations. Sages speak of juggernauts the size of a majestic temple that moved like quicksilver at the speed of its wearer's thoughts and that siphoned fuel from the souls of those culled under its wagon-sized fists of adamantine. The battlesmiths wrought blades of pure soulfire for the empire's champions to bear against the dragon hordes. The soul-sizzling power of these hellforged swords was so dire that a mere touch of their blades could ignite an enemy with everburning flames that consumed them slowly over the course of an agonizing century. If legends are to believed, these weapons were the most meager of the smiths' efforts. More terrifying records, including remnants of old tablets and scorched tatters of parchment, report actions so diabolical that most sages dismiss them as fancy or fraud—for to accept them as fact might break a person's sanity in half.

These dubious reports testify to giant black spheres of void space set to explode and eat entire cities. They speak of a helm whose wearer can break an entire dimension to splinters of astral space and leave their people howling in oblivion. The terrors produced in the Hellforge Crucible are the stuff of legends and nightmares.

The Crucible's custodian, a deranged pit fiend named Rithzalgor, still reigns here. The twisted, palsied devil towers over everything around him. His thick, dragon-choking hands are strong enough to shape adamantine since he has spent thousands of years of smithing in the dark. Bound for eternity to serve House Zolfura as the master smith of Hellforge, the pit fiend's mind buckled under the strain of millennia trapped beneath crushing ash and the ongoing task of repairing the Crucible's Hellforge, which was obliterated in the cataclysm that consumed the city. Far more terrifying than an insane pit fiend (if such a thing can be imagined) is the fact that after thousands of years Rithzalgor and his minions might be on the brink of a breakthrough. If the warped pit fiend can stir the soul-embers of the Hellforge to life again, the world will witness the terrors of Bael Turath's war machine once more. With the Hellforge active, who knows what terrible juggernauts or world-ending weapons Rithzalgor can produce from its searing fires of creation. Rumors of his progress have reached the ears of several kings, and now mutterings of a crusade to quell the Hellforge once and for all have begun in the surrounding kingdoms. Such an endeavor might destroy an entire generation of able-bodied warriors. If no brave adventurers step up to the challenge of ending Rithzalgor soon, the world might weep rivers of smoking blood.

Pool of Bronze

Not all devils bound by the three houses were easy to control. Some had to be dealt with in terrible ways. The Pool of Bronze, a superheated lake of molten bronze, was infused with powerful spells of unmak-

ing. Devils that proved troublesome to the rulers of Vor Kragal were not merely banished, but rather smelted down torturously in this pool of molten slag, and their evil souls dissolved along with their bodies. However, unruly hellions are not so easily dispatched. The pool soon took on a rancorous life of its own, and it claimed more than a few victims when it escaped its confines and flooded the streets of Lower Kragal in a deluge of devil-driven liquid fire and bronze. The entire Council of Darkness and all their warlocks toiled for days to herd the living lake back to its containment pool. Rumor purports puddles of the hell-infused substance persisted through the city for years afterward and occasionally preyed on unsuspecting citizens and vagrants in the lower districts.

The dormant pool now only roils gently in its heavily warded pit deep in the bowels of the crater city. As one of the biggest lures in the area, the pool draws an occasional curious and ambitious explorer. Rumor has it that anyone who falls into the pool emerges glazed in hell-bronze and is granted fell powers beyond mortal ken. Some adventurers probe the dangerous reaches of Vor Kragal not in search for gold or magic, but rather in hopes of immersing themselves in this pool, so they might rise up from its fiery depths more powerful than anyone could ever imagine. The only adventurer known to have made it to the Pool of Bronze and returned to tell the tale is Gharl Braktharn, a tiefling warlord of great power who lost his right arm to a giant's axe years before. Although he did not immerse his entire body in the pool, he did dip the stump of his upper arm in, and when he pulled it forth, an arm of living bronze sprouted from it. Gharl's new arm could punch through solid adamantine and shield him from dragon's breath, but its boon came with a price. He claimed to hear sibilant whispers night and day that echoed from the bronze appendage—he purportedly muttered something about the fevered voices of a chorus of devils. Poor Gharl eventually went mad, before wrapping his bronze fingers around his own throat and choking himself to death. The arm was rumored to hang in a private collection at one point, but it disappeared after some would-be thieves were found dismembered near its gore-soaked display case.

Charspire

Charspire is a citadel with spires created from the blackened bones of a dragon's jagged rib cage, and it reaches a half mile into the sky. Lightning caresses the spires constantly. These blue-white tendrils reach down from the swirling purple tempest that oft darkens Vor Kragal's accursed sky.

Charspire was the stronghold of House Barikdral at the height of Bael Turath's power. The fortress, constructed entirely of charred bone and scorched sinew, was shut five years before the fall of the city and it never opened again. The members of House Barikdral sequestered themselves within it. From then on their dire masters dealt with others only through undead mouthpieces expelled through disgusting corpuscles on the citadel's surface. These slime-slick servitors relayed messages from the Barikdral to the other houses, and issued general edicts to the citizens of the city by roving the streets at midnight, crooning and gurgling into the darkness.

Even during the cataclysm that brought Vor Kragal to its knees, the Charspire was impregnable. Whatever prodigious effects the Barikdral placed on their stronghold occluded even the most potent translocation magic and rebuffed epic magical assaults.

Charspire still stands today. Dubious eyewitness reports of the city's rise from the ashen fields years ago claim the Charspire broke ground first and led the rest of Vor Kragal up from the depths. More disturbing is the Charspire's tendency to wander. The huge citadel rarely appears at the same place inside Vor Kragal. The Charspire, either at the command of some deathless master within or because of an ongoing effect left behind by the fallen Barikdral, teleports to a new location each night. Usually the bone citadel confines its wanderings to the city proper of Vor Kragal, but on occasion, people living in settlements near the city have spotted the Charspire looming unsettlingly close, which means it can move itself several leagues from the ashen ruins of its home. The paranoid among these witnesses claim that two red lights gleam from the citadel's upper parapets on these terrifying nights. They say the Charspire is watching them, carefully surveying the power of nearby settlements in preparation for something terrible.

If a master of Charspire still lives, no one has laid eyes on this being. Some say the citadel is its own master now and is imbued with a dread unlife. Many dismiss the movements as random or even a trick of the moonlight. To any who record its travels, it becomes painfully obvious the Charspire's movements have a method to their madness. The Charspire moves in strange oscillating spirals over the course of years as if it were patrolling the region, or scouting for foes.

The Charspire's movements make it the easiest landmark in Vor Kragal to approach. On some nights it sits far from the other dangers of the city. However, the few attempts made to breach the gates have unleashed a torrent of moaning undead and giant bone golems that slaughter every living creature in sight with impunity. More than one village setting down its roots too near Vor Kragal has been devoured wholesale by the predations of these rotting things after a foolhardy band of adventurers wandered up to the citadel in the black of night.

The Vein Maze

The gory seat of power of House Kahlir, this vast labyrinth of red stone and brick is said to be mortared together with the blood of a dozen empires. In the culling days of House Kahlir's height, thousands of

slaves where brought to the Vein Maze daily, all destined to be drained to husks.

The dizzying labyrinth is filled with secret exsanguination chambers, hidden altars of brutal sacrifice, pleasure baths of boiling blood said to restore decades of life to a mortal who bathes in them, bizarre honeycomb chambers of bloodsucking insects—each the size of an elephant calf—and a thousand other obscene affronts to the gods. In the glory days of Kahlir, the maze was their sprawling pleasure palace where they could feed with impunity and revel in their bloodthirst.

The Vein Maze also served as Vor Kragal's prison, though the sentence ended up being death by the painful draining of every ounce of the prisoner's blood. These drained husks patrolled the maze after their punishment was meted out. From prisoner to warden, the husks roved in gangs, ensuring the other inmates or trespassers underwent the same horrific transformation they had suffered. Reports from the few adventurers who have braved the Vein Maze since Kragal's rise report these gangs are still plentiful, with thousands of ghouls and zombies prowling every corner of the twisting labyrinth.

If any members of House Kahlir still live, they are no doubt nestled somewhere in the heart of this dizzying hell. The Kahlir gave themselves over to vampirism long before the fall of the city, and they slaked their daily thirst on a hundred warm bodies' worth of blood. If they still live today, their thirst must be maddening after a millennia trapped below tons of ash, and sages suggest they are more than likely feral creatures driven to utter frenzy by their hungers.

Tower of the Mirror King

A thorn in the side of the three families, Sharvast the Mirror King stood aloof from their eldritch-handed rule for centuries. His stronghold, a majestic mirrored tower, stands on the northern tier of Vor Kragal, where it pompously overlooks the rest of the city proper and sits over the three houses' centers of power. Within its silvered halls, the Mirror King kept no minions and no servants. He led a life of quiet solitude while experimenting in strange elements of the universe better left unmentioned. Rumor purports that Sharvast was originally a younger scion of one of the three houses. Reports contradict each other as to which specific one, and a few scholars claim he was the union of an illicit affair between the matron of Barikdral and a young Bloodlord of Kahlir.

Others claim he was no tiefling at all, but instead he came from a distant alien realm, and his own kind sent him into among their lessers. Whatever mystery spawned him, Sharvast chose Vor Kragal as his sanctuary, and his Mirrored Tower appeared one night on the ridge above the city, where Keep Pallencast once stood. The legion of devils and their warlock master at Pallencast vanished along with the stronghold, never to be heard from again.

The houses began plotting against this fearsome newcomer since they feared he was determined to usurp their control of the city. No doubt they also wished to steal whatever secrets of power Sharvast brought with him from the great beyond. Their plots did not bear fruit. After dozens of assassination attempts and equally violent reprisals by Sharvast, they all acquiesced to an unspoken truce.

Sharvast experimented with transdimensional magic of sanity-shredding power, creating mirrors that not only look into far-off realms, but also allow instant travel to and from them. The problems arose when Sharvast's mirrors began to focus on one particular dimension—a cold barren place of crystal and wind, seemingly empty of life. Sharvast did not know it at first, but strange eyes peered back from this wasteland and bore into his soul. He became an agent of these unknown beings, supposedly constructing other mirrored towers the world over, through which these aliens might peer into the world and spread like locusts. No one knows the truth of this insidious threat, and some scholars discovered evidence that the destruction of Vor Kragal might have had little to do with the dragonborn and everything to do with Sharvast's mirrored tower.

The tower's mirrors are broken now, rent by the cataclysmic fury that brought all Vor Kragal low, but those few adventurers who have wandered close to Sharvast's stronghold and lived to tell the tale are mostly insane, muttering over and over again about the cracked eyes still gazing out from the shattered surfaces of the Tower of the Mirror King.

Pyramid of Lost Tales

This giant edifice of sandstone, inset with several thousand fist-sized tiger eye gems, is covered with inscriptions in hundreds of languages. These bizarre writings are said to document not only the history of Vor Kragal and the tiefling empire of Bael Turath, but also tales of deeds, kings, heroes, and gods dating back to time immemorial. The pyramid's interior is likewise a testament to knowledge and history, filled with level upon level of standing stone tablets bearing the forgotten verses of time's lonely song. Many of the inscriptions bear tales from the time after Vor Kragal's fall. It is unknown whether chroniclers kept to their task buried below the ash, somehow learning of surface events, or whether the custodians of this pyramid were masters of divination who looked into the future as easily as a mortal might gaze out a window.

Nowadays the pyramid's interior is prowled by an undead eye tyrant of unthinkable power named Lobosaht. This beholder lich lairs in the Hall of Lost Heroes, where statues of some of history's mightiest champions stand sentinel over the pyramid's coveted rune tablets. The hall is peopled by hundreds of statues of august minotaur kings, great giant warlords, skilled human warriors, dragonborn champions, dwarf kings, and orc chieftains. Some sages believe these statues are no simple renderings

Lobosaht

but rather true heroes of a hundred ages, turned to stone forever and now stoic golems under Lobosaht's command.

Bliss

Once a gigantic domed arboretum filled with wonders of the natural world, Bliss was a retreat for the city's wealthiest and most powerful citizens during Vor Kragal's heyday. Titanic primeval animals and stranger beasts roamed free inside this five-mile-diameter domed jungle. Quartered-off garden villas showed off thousands of varieties of wild flowers and mystical specimens long since lost to the world—roses whose scent bewitched anyone into thinking the next person they laid eyes on was the love of his life, purple flowers from which a tea can be brewed that causes the drinker to grow to a titan's size, herbs whose bitter taste turns the imbiber to a wraithlike being for all eternity. When calamity struck the city, the dome of magic glass shattered and the wild inhabitants ran through the streets, trampling and goring all in their path. Now the wild tangle of exotic plant life has spread, overtaking the entire district surrounding Bliss. Only tenacious and lethal plants survived the cataclysm—horrid weeds that crush a person to paste and absorb their vital juices, or burrow into their skulls and nourish themselves on brains. Some spread fungus through a person's bone marrow, turning the victim into spongy monstrosities.

At the center of the ruined arboretum, a fungal tyrant holds court with poisonous trees and fields of carnivorous weeds. This tyrant is the size of a great wyrm and its touch melts any living creature to fetid mulch.

Yazadoun's Folly

A few hundred years ago, a tiefling warlock named Yazadoun boldly erected a fortress of marble with solid adamantine gates overlooking the cataclysm-wracked fields of ash and ruin that once were Vor Kragal, as if daring the desolate city to oppose him. The evening after Yazadoun's stone giant slaves put the last titanic block of marble in place, the fortress was utterly obliterated by a fiery meteorite that fell from the night's sky. The site was named Yazadoun's Folly, and the ruined crater, surrounded by a husk of marble sprinkled with meteorite fragments, is now a favored launch point or base camp for adventurers planning to brave Vor Kragal's terrors. Those camping here for a night sleep fitfully, if at all, since their gaze is almost compelled to look to the heavens while they remain in the area.

In recent years, though, those brave enough to head to Vor Kragal and who intend to camp in or around the crater have come to depend on Shakrath Levora, a gaunt tiefling with jaundiced yellow skin and a penchant for pungent perfumes, who has set up a small, but permanent encampment in the area. For a small price, he offers those visiting the area a bag of dried herbs to brew into a tea of sorts. By drinking the tea, those camping within the crater's unsettling presence lose the urge to look upward, though many claim to feel irritable after they rest. The mystery of why Shakrath chooses to stay in the area himself has not yet been solved, but perhaps one day someone will draw it out of him.

Legendary Treasures of Vor Kragal

What attracts some hearty (or foolhardy) souls to squander their lives in the hell-stench and burning caress of Vor Kragal's ruinous craters and ashen fields? Glory draws some, and most perish in search of treasures whose sparkle could spur even the oldest and most jaded dragon's eye to gleam with wanton greed.

The Shattered Spear of Myrdroon

Before humanity could put ink to parchment, a storm giant overlord named Myrdroon claimed the clouds above Vor Kragal as his pleasure paradise. When the tieflings built a sprawling empire beneath him and choked his castle with soot and hellsmoke, the storm giant was displeased. Myrdroon rallied his twelve brothers and the lot of them rode giant white dragons down upon the tiefling capital. A battle waged for several weeks, and at its close Myrdroon hurled his coveted *Spear of the Skylord* down upon the then stronghold of the city—a black castle called Middendark. Middendark exploded into smithereens and the death toll caused by this dread act soared into the

thousands. Myrdroon was felled by a hail of poisonous arrows shortly thereafter, but his devastating assault left its scar on the city for an age. His spear shattered into dozens of shards when it struck Middendark and these jagged pieces of sky metal, infused with the essence of lightning, thunder, and rain, can still be found in the city. Many fragments were buried miles deep in the earth by the explosion of Middendark, and over time erosion and earthquakes have brought several to the surface. Powerful warlocks and wizards of the city collected other shards of the spear and put them to dire use against the dragonborn in the centuries of warfare that followed.

It is said that a fragment of the spear grants mortals the power over the wind and sky and turns their hearts to pure lightning with which they can smite entire armies to wispy ash.

Weapon of Myrdroon's Shard — **Level 4+**

Made from a shard of Myrdroon's spear, this weapon looses devastating lightning.

Lvl 4	+1	840 gp	**Lvl 19**	+4	105,000 gp
Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	**Lvl 24**	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	**Lvl 29**	+6	2,625,000 gp

Weapon: Spear
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d8 lightning damage per plus
Power (At-Will): Standard Action. Make a melee basic attack with the weapon, with reach one greater than normal. All damage dealt by this attack is lightning damage.

Power (Daily ✦ Lightning): Free Action. Use this power when you hit with the weapon. Push the target 2 squares, and the target and each creature adjacent to the target takes 1d8 lightning damage.
Level 14 or 19: Push 5, 2d8 lightning damage.
Level 24 or 29: Push 10, 3d8 lightning damage.

Artifact: Spear of the Skylord

The *Spear of the Skylord* is appropriate for paragon-tier characters and higher.

If all the fragments of the *Spear of the Skylord* are gathered in one place, an unknown ritual can reconstruct the *Spear* from the shards.

Spear of the Skylord — **Paragon Level**

This longspear is always twice the height of its chosen bearer. Its haft is as black as a starless night sky, and its blade is the white of pure clouds. It was granted to a wind archon general during the earliest war, and it brings war from the skies even still.

The *Spear of the Skylord* is a +3 *longspear* with the following properties and powers.
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +3d6 thunder damage, or +3d8 thunder damage against creatures standing on the ground
Property: Your reach with this weapon is 3.
Property: You gain a +2 item bonus to Intimidate checks.

Power (Daily ✦ Lightning): Standard Action. You throw the *Spear*, and it hits like a lightning strike. Area burst 4 within 20; Strength vs. Reflex; 2d10 + Strength modifier lightning damage, and the target is knocked prone. *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is not knocked prone. The *Spear* reforms in your hand after the attack.

Power (Encounter): Minor Action. You stir the sky's mighty winds. Close blast 5; Strength vs. Fortitude; the target is pushed 5 squares.
The *Spear* is appropriate for paragon-tier characters.

Goals of the Spear of the Skylord

- ✦ Be possessed by a ruler of sky or a sky-living people.
- ✦ Participate in war against people living on or in the earth.
- ✦ Kill servants of the gods.

Roleplaying the Spear of the Skylord

The *Spear* does not speak. It communicates its goals and satisfaction with its owner through gentle pulls, subtle emotions, and pulses of encouraging or discouraging energy along its haft. The *Spear* wants to be wielded by a strong, militant ruler, and it prefers commanding and militant owners that take charge and inflict their will on others.

Concordance

Starting score	5
Owner gains a level	+1d10
Owner can fly	+2
Owner slays a servant of a god (max 1/day)	+1
Owner conquers a town, city, or kingdom	+1
Owner submits to another's authority (max 1/day)	-1
Owner loses a battle	-1

Transcendent (Over 20)

"None rule over me or my sky."

The *Spear* is proud to be in the possession of such a great commander.

The *Spear*'s enhancement bonus increases to +4.
Critical: +4d6 thunder damage, or +4d8 thunder damage against creatures standing on the ground.
Property: Your fly speed increases by 4. If you have no fly speed, you gain fly 4.

Pleased (16–20)

"I challenge the right of the earthbound to command their own fate."

The owner's conquests please the *Spear*, and it gives the owner greater power to continue the military campaign.

Property: The item bonus to Intimidate checks increases to +4.
Power (Encounter): Free Action. Use this power when you hit a creature with this weapon. The creature falls to the ground (if flying, taking falling damage as normal) and is immobilized (save ends).

Satisfied (12–15)

"Onward! Hordes yet remain for us to conquer!"
The owner has proved himself a champion against the earthbound. The *Spear* spurs its owner toward greater heights with greater gifts.

Property: You gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls against any creature standing on the ground.
Power (Daily): Standard Action. As the warlord's *beat them into the ground* power, but it affects allies within 10 squares of you.

Normal (5–11)

"I have the Spear, now I must claim a kingdom."
The *Spear* keeps the owner under constant scrutiny, pushing him or her toward dominance of others.

Unsatisfied (1–4)

"The Spear chafes under my self-restraint."
The owner does not seek the control that the *Spear* desires, and the *Spear* resorts to stronger encouragement.

Special: You take a –2 penalty to Diplomacy checks.

Angered (Below 1)

"I escape the Spear's wrath only by bearing it."
The *Spear* considers its owner unworthy. If the owner does not find redemption soon, the *Spear* exacts punishment upon him or her. Until then, the spear creates predicaments in which the owner might find a path to rulership.

Special: Once per day, when you are addressed by a person of authority, the *Spear* leaps into its owner's hands and makes a melee basic attack against the person.

Moving On

"My sovereignty is in danger!"
The *Spear of the Skylord* leaves its owner in a spectacular fashion. When the owner (typically fashioned "the Skylord") is engaged in a pivotal battle (often one on a scale involving armies), the *Spear* leaps from its owner's hand, and sails into the midst of the enemy or the enemy's stronghold, where it explodes with thunder and lightning, devastating the enemy. Thereafter, shards of the weapon wander the earth until they are again joined into the *Spear*.

If the *Spear* is displeased with its owner, it instead brings ruin to the owner's homeland. Massive cyclones and tornadoes descend upon the nation and cause disaster after disaster, and in the chaos the *Spear* disappears from its owner's possession.

The Black Tongue of Mabberaj

Mabberaj was not the greatest of Vor Kragal's warlocks, but he was by far the most insane. His experiments caused even his devil-blooded peers to wince in revulsion, and his dark works eventually earned him a slow death eaten by hellmaggots, which was a torturous end reserved for the most despicable dregs of Bael Turath. Much to the chagrin of his fellow tieflings, the warlock's foulness did not cease after his demise. Many of Mabberaj's vilest creations persisted long after his death, and the most vexing of these is his *Black Tongue*. They claim Mabberaj harvested this sickening appendage from some foul creature, although what, specifically, is nearly beyond comprehension. The *Tongue* allowed Mabberaj to speak to undead and demons in a language of power that brought creatures of either vile heritage to their knees before him. They say necromancy and summoning incantations worked through the tongue had ten times their usual power and that a word spat from it could reduce a living person to a cloud of bloat flies or a festering dog carcass.

Rumor purports that the *Black Tongue* crawls about now of its own power, and a ward of power transports it back to the ruined city of Vor Kragal every thirteen years, from whence it begins its slow travels out to civilization to plague the unsuspecting living once more. The abomination is a blight so evil that most hellspawn try to destroy it. Some theorize that the *Black Tongue* recently transported back to Vor Kragal after strangling good King Hardrol the Evenhand in his sleep. More than one black-hearted necromancer and diabolical warlock harbor dreams of replacing their own tongues with the thick, forked cast-off of Mabberaj. Others seek the repugnant murdering appendage to visit vengeance upon it for a fell deed or murdered kinfolk. Some more noble adventurers seek to rid the world of its curse once and for all.

Creatures of Kahlir

Created through the torturous draining of their once-living blood, Kahlir husks seek to recover what they lost. Husks appear as withered, desiccated humanoid corpses, their skin drawn taut from a lack of body fluids.

The Kahlir themselves became monsters whose only sustenance came from blood, and some became truly immortal. Now, those few that remain lust for blood more than anything else. Kahlir vampires look much as other sorts of vampires, although their faces are nearly always slightly flushed and plump, as if they had recently fed.

Kahlir bloodworms denied fresh blood, their only source of sustence, can form a rock-hard coccoon. But when fresh blood nears, they wriggle free of their stone-hard husks and seek the bags of sweet, red sustenance. The worms are nearly 5 feet long, and the dark red of fresh blood when they've freshly fed. Their coloration grows more and more pale the longer they are denied the blood they crave.

Kahlir Husk **Level 10 Soldier**
Medium natural animate (undead) XP 500
Initiative 6 **Senses** Perception +7; darkvision
HP 106; **Bloodied** 53
AC 25; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 22
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 15 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Speed 8
⊕ **Blood Claw** (standard; at-will)
+16 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage, and the target is immobilized (until escape). The Kahlir husk cannot use this attack if two creatures are currently immobilized by its *blood claw*.
ᚾ **Blood Siphon** (minor; at-will)
+15 vs. Fortitude; immobilized living creature only; 4 damage, and the husk regains 4 hit points.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 18 (+9) **Dex** 9 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 3 (+1) **Cha** 3 (+1)

Kahlir Husk Tactics

A husk closes distance and immobilizes a target so that it can use *blood siphon* as often as possible.

Kahlir Vampire **Level 12 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 700
Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +10; darkvision
HP 120; **Bloodied** 60
AC 26; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 25
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Speed 6
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)
+17 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage.
✦ **Call to Blood** (standard; at-will)
Ranged 2; +16 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 5 damage and the Kahlir vampire or another undead within 2 squares regains 5 hit points.
✦ **Blood Root** (immediate interrupt, when an enemy within 10 squares of the Kahlir vampire moves; at-will)
+16 vs. Fortitude; the target is immobilized (save ends).
✧ **Summons by Blood** (standard; recharge ⚁ ⚂)
Close burst 6; +16 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is pulled 2 squares.
Alignment Evil **Languages** Common
Skills Bluff +16, Diplomacy +16, Intimidate +16
Str 14 (+8) **Dex** 16 (+9) **Wis** 18 (+10)
Con 16 (+9) **Int** 20 (+11) **Cha** 20 (+11)

Kahlir Vampire Tactics

When a vampire detects a source of blood after being so long imprisoned in Vor Kragal, it hunts without rest. A Kahlir vampire hunts with Kahlir husks, keeping its prey away while it sucks free as much blood as possible.

Kahlir Bloodworm **Level 11 Brute**
Medium natural beast XP 600
Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +7; darkvision
HP 130; **Bloodied** 65
AC 23; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 22
Speed 4
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
+14 vs. AC; 2d10 + 6 damage.
ᚾ **Flesh Tear** (standard; at-will)
+14 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage, and ongoing 10 damage (save ends).
✧ **Writhe of Hunger** (immediate reaction, when an adjacent creature is bloodied; at-will)
Close burst 1; +14 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 20 (+10) **Dex** 10 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 5 (+2) **Cha** 5 (+2)

Kahlir Bloodworm Tactics

A bloodworm hopes to catch many creatures with *writhe of hunger*. *Flesh tear* helps the bloodworm reach this goal, since the monster inflicts wounds that further drain prey off the bloodworm's turn.

Bloodworms have generations of conditioning to ensure that they obey members of the Kahlir family.

About the Author

Nicolas Logue is a composite of several different real-life madmen and degenerates. A collection of works are attributed to "Nicolas Logue" such as *Voyage of the Golden Dragon*, *Eyes of the Lich Queen*, and Pathfinder #3: Hook Mountain Massacre. Another "Logue" has recently been hired by Paizo Publishng as their Organized Play Coordinator. Yet another is a stage actor and fight choreographer in NYC.

Playing Warforged

The triumph of magic, the mystery of life, and the horror of war personified.

by Chris Sims

illustrations by Eric Deschamps

CREATED AS SOLDIERS for a war that spelled the end of an age, warforged are artificial beings that display a human level of intelligence and self-awareness. Warforged sentience developed as a side effect of their creators' desire to have fully functional, adaptive battlefield units. With no great war to fight, no ancient legacy to claim, and only the vestiges of a culture developed within the past century, warforged are an emergent people. Integrated into the societies of peoples more numerous than they, warforged are famed for their endurance and focus, in labor as well as combat.

Play a warforged if you want . . .

- to be strong, tough, and built for battle.
- to play a nonliving hero with a magical origin.
- to be a great defender, particularly a fighter.

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RACIAL TRAITS

Average Height: 6'0"-6'6"
Average Weight: 270-300 lb.

Ability Scores: +2 Strength, +2 Constitution
Size: Medium
Speed: 6 squares
Vision: Normal

Languages: Common
Skill Bonus: +2 Endurance, +2 Intimidate
Construct: You have the construct keyword, so you are considered to be a construct for effects that relate to that keyword.
Living Construct: As a living construct, you have the following traits.

- You gain a +2 bonus to saving throws against ongoing damage.
- You can use attached components and embedded components made for warforged (see Equipment, page 33).
- You don't need to eat, drink, or breathe, but this doesn't render you immune to any combat effect.
- Rather than sleep, warforged spend 4 hours refraining from any strenuous activity. You need to spend 4 hours in this state to gain the same benefits other races gain from taking a 6-hour extended rest. While resting in this low-exertion state, you are fully aware of your surroundings and notice approaching enemies and other events as normal.
- When reduced to 0 hit points, you are less likely to die. When you make a death saving throw, you can take the better of your die roll or 10. You still die at the normal negative hit point total.

Warforged Mind: You gain a +1 racial bonus to your Will defense.
Warforged Resolve: You can use *warforged resolve* as an encounter power.

Warforged Resolve — Warforged Racial Power

It's difficult to take you down, even when you're faltering.

Encounter ✦ Healing
Minor Action **Personal**

Effect: You gain a number of temporary hit points equal to 3 + one-half your level. You can make an immediate saving throw against one effect that deals ongoing damage and can be ended with a save. In addition, if you are bloodied you regain hit points equal to 3 + one-half your level.

Physical Qualities

A warforged is a bulky humanoid with a skin of plates made of metal and stone, supported by a skeleton of similar material and a musculature of leathery, woody fiber bundles. An internal network of tubes filled with bloodlike fluid nourishes and lubricates warforged systems. Powerful warforged arms end in two-fingered, thumbed hands, and warforged feet each have two broad toes.

Simple humanlike features—heavy brows, hinged jaws with no teeth, no nose—make up a warforged's face. Its eyes sometimes glow when it experiences intense emotions, and its forehead and pate bears runic whorls. Each warforged has a unique rune on its forehead, much like humans have distinctive fingerprints. This rune is known as a "ghulra," a word that means "truth" in Primordial.

Warforged have an obviously artificial and sexless shape. They can't reproduce themselves like other humanoids. However, their sense of pain seems limited to actual injury, allowing them to modify their own bodies more easily. Such physical modifications allow warforged to be as varied in appearance as other races.

Playing a Warforged

Often limited in experience, used to being occupied with various duties, and built for killing, a warforged has a straightforward emotional range. It likes working, takes pride in doing its assigned tasks well, and dislikes idleness and falling short of a goal. Pain and the threat of death, which a warforged often sees as the equivalent of oblivion, can motivate it to fear. Attachment to comrades and acquaintances can emerge as a gamut of emotions, not the least of which are joy and loyalty. Like any other being, a warforged can be driven to anger when that which it loves or desires is threatened, and it can come to hate those who are the sources of pain, fear, or other negative experiences. A warforged is often, however, a literal-minded being with simple and reserved feelings, along with reactionary passions.

None of this is meant to suggest that all warforged are naïve, emotionally crippled, or lacking in introspection, although all these can be true. If anything, a warforged can be more curious about the whys and wherefores of life and existence than those born in more "natural" ways. A few warforged develop deeply sophisticated observations and philosophies about what they perceive and learn. Others create an endless list of goals and chores to occupy themselves. Still others fall in with beings of a similar mindset, or become enamored of established creeds or religions. Some warforged have even lived long enough to develop a deep personality.

War and military conditioning color warforged behavior. Many warforged have keen insight when it comes to conflict, chain of command, and other elements of war and soldierly life. Further, most warforged are single-minded and efficient with their undertakings, especially in combat.

Issues of gender are unique among warforged. As sexless beings, many warforged never consider issues of gender, and they find such issues among other races curious or even worrisome. Other warforged adopt habits they find admirable or amusing, without considering gender or disregarding any possible incongruity. A few warforged develop a personality that is decidedly female or male.

Many warforged mull over the subject of the afterlife. Whether warforged have a soul that endures after death is a mystery. Religious leaders have differing opinions on the topic. Can a being created by humans have a soul?

Warforged Characteristics: Aggressive, alert, brave, curious, forthright, industrious, loyal, methodical, naïve, practical, reserved, simple.

Warforged Names: Azm, Book, Bulwark, Cutter, Falchion, Graven, Hammer, Mark, Morg, Nameless, Pierce, Pious, Relic, Rune, Steeple, Three, Titan, Unsung, Victor, Watcher, Zealot.

In the past, warforged had names imposed upon them—usually having to do with military rank and position. Most warforged end up with simple names related to their job or abilities. Some warforged accept names or nicknames that their comrades give them, while others search for an ideal name that defines them. Many just take a name common to members of another race, especially those of humans.

Warforged Adventurers

Warforged often lack a clear place in the world. With no connections other than friendship, and with talents running toward combat, warforged readily form bonds with daring and driven people. A large portion of the warforged population serves in venturesome occupations, especially when compared to the number of adventurers that come from among other races. Here are a few samples.

Spire is a warforged fighter who specializes in the greatsword. After observing that females "create life and hold society together in various ways," she became fascinated with the feminine gender. Thus, she modified her body, demeanor, and attire to fit her worldview. In the field, she's an efficient warrior who considers herself the guardian of all her allies, valuing their lives far above her own. Blade sheathed and armor removed, she is motherly to all those she holds dear.

Thunderstruck is a warforged cleric of Kord (or Dol Dorn in Eberron). He sees the warforged as Kord's chosen people, who are manifested in the world to bring glory to themselves and the god of battle. With this philosophy in mind, Thunderstruck willingly takes up any just cause that requires his strength and skill. He openly seeks personal renown, which ultimately honors Kord. Against his enemies, he is a fearless storm of steel—a worldly expression of what he believes is the warforged ideal.

Null is a warforged warlock tied to the unfathomable mysteries of the star pact. A hunger for individuality drove Null to his path, which he also considers part of his rejection of human norms. He engraves his body and belongings with mystical and maddening sigils, and he savors the fear he evokes in his enemies and in common folk. Although taciturn, darkly candid, and gloomy in manner, Null prefers to use his power to punish those he feels deserve it. He secretly enjoys the grudging admirations his heroics garner him.

Racial Feats

Warforged have a number of feats all their own.

Heroic Tier Feats

These feats are available to any warforged character who meets the prerequisites.

Component Modification [Warforged]

Prerequisite: Warforged

Benefit: Your body takes better advantage of warforged components. For each component you have, your *warforged resolve* racial power grants you 1 temporary hit point, up to a maximum bonus equal to your Constitution modifier.

Immutability [Warforged]

Prerequisites: Warforged, Improved Warforged Resolve

Benefit: Whenever you use your *warforged resolve* racial power, you can also make a free saving throw against one condition or ongoing damage effect affecting you.

Improved Warforged Resolve [Warforged]

Prerequisites: Warforged, *warforged resolve* racial power

Benefit: Your *warforged resolve* power grants you an additional 5 temporary hit points.

Warforged Tactics [Warforged]

Prerequisite: Warforged

Benefit: You gain a +1 bonus to melee attack rolls against a target when you have an ally adjacent to that target.

Paragon Tier Feat

This feat is available to any warforged character of 11th level or higher who meets the prerequisites.

Improved Immutability [Warforged]

Prerequisites: Warforged, Immutability, Improved Warforged Resolve

Benefit: The *improved immutability* racial utility power replaces one of your utility powers. The power it replaces must be 12th level or higher. If you do not yet have a 12th-level or higher power, you can replace the appropriate power when you gain it.

In addition, when you use your second wind, you gain a +2 bonus to all saving throws until the end of your current turn.

Improved Immutability — **Feat Power**

Seemingly through determination alone, your living construct body regularly proves inviolate.

Daily
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: You gain a condition or ongoing damage effect that ends with a save.
Effect: Immediately end the effect as if you had succeeded on your saving throw against it.

Epic Tier Feat

This feat is available to any warforged character of 21st level or higher who meets the prerequisites.

Warforged Fortification [Warforged]

Prerequisite: Warforged, Immutability, Improved Immutability, Improved Warforged Resolve

Benefit: The *warforged fortification* racial utility power replaces your 22nd-level utility power. If you do not yet have a 22nd-level utility power, you can replace the power when you gain it.

Warforged Fortification — **Feat Power**

You're so tough, sometimes critical hits just don't faze you.

Encounter
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**
Trigger: You take a critical hit.
Effect: Negate the critical hit. The triggering attack instead deals normal damage. The attack does not gain any of the benefits for scoring a critical hit, such as extra damage due to a magic item or the opportunity to recharge a power.

Warforged Origin

The mighty human empire of Nerath once spanned hundreds of thousands of square miles. Within its borders, culture and learning flourished, including the study of magic. Wizards and artificers began to advance in the study of constructs, especially homunculi and other responsive creatures.

More than three centuries ago, King Eothyr III opened imperial coffers to the Society of Imperial Artificers, an organization of learned arcanists honored by, but independent of, the king. He set their goal as an adaptive artificial being—one that didn't imprison another creature, such as an immortal spirit or elemental being, as the spark for sentience. This new being had to be autonomously capable of its tasks and able to learn.

Eothyr's son, Elidyr ascended to the throne upon his father's death, before the artificers had succeeded at their work. Rumblings of unrest among savages within the empire led Elidyr to turn the work in the direction of war. He wanted a soldier, not just a utopian construct.

Soon after, the Society of Imperial Artificers completed the first creation forge, along with the rituals that led to the birth of the first warforged. But Elidyr's desires split the society along ideological lines. Some of its visionaries wanted the constructs Eothyr had envisioned. Renegade artificers split from the society, taking with them copies of the techniques used to create warforged.

However, Elidyr's preparations for war turned out to be precognitive. Nerath soon found itself in a massive campaign against savage humanoids and demons. The king allowed nobles to eschew battlefield duty if they could pay for warforged to be built to take their place. Nerath's treasury financed even more artificial soldiers. All over the empire, even turncoat artificers used their creation forges to build warforged for the war effort.

Never numerous, warforged still played a significant role in the hostilities. With them, Nerath emerged victorious. Decapitated by the deaths of its king, its heirs, and some of its most influential leaders, the empire crumbled quickly into factional war and territorial squabbling. Creation forges were sometimes turned to the service of petty nobles, among other, stranger uses. Surviving warforged were conscripted into new armies, enslaved, or left to their own devices.

After a few decades, regional wars subsided as trade dwindled and local nobles consolidated power. Nerath ultimately disintegrated into independent states separated by vast swaths of wilderness. Even

so, the warforged endured, though most of their older generations died in battle.

Even though Nerath is no more, several creation forges still exist and continue to produce new warforged. Those run by the Society of Imperial Artificers, which thrives still under its old moniker, produce warforged for sale to military forces, as well as for the society's own employment. Such warforged are the most common, and the society enforces a tour period, after which these warforged are supposed to earn their freedom. Renegade artificers run a number of independent forges, building and releasing warforged as free creatures, or enslaving them to nefarious ends. Veteran warforged run at least one other forge in a remote location, propagating their species and teaching new warforged the ways of battle. Fearful commoners whisper that, one day, these warforged—or others like them—will come to conquer. Similar rumors of other extant creation forges, being run for good or ill, surface regularly, even outside the boundaries of fallen Nerath.

Warforged in Your Campaign

The warforged race fits into any D&D campaign that embraces other sorts of magic constructs. The desire to create conscious beings is held by many mages who create constructs. Living and sentient, yet artificial, warforged are a natural extension of similar creatures that have less awareness but greater physical power.

How warforged fit into a campaign is limited only by your imagination. Perhaps warforged are relatively new in the world, as the Warforged Origin section of this article suggests. Alternatively, they could be an ancient and self-propagating people with similar features, but a different history and personality. What about an experiment in immortality—a trial that went wrong and preserved the experimenters in artificial bodies, but erased their memories? Just as easily, they could be something weirder and evocative, such as exoskeletons created by humans or another race to house a limbless allied species. It could be that they're a race of humanlike beings that clad themselves in armored bodies at adulthood. Maybe the single warforged PC in your campaign is a unique individual with a tragic story like that of Frankenstein's monster. Or suppose he's just the favored servant of a powerful wizard—the party's patron.

Warforged offer great roleplaying opportunities. They come with interesting questions and unusual quirks built into them. Issues such as souls, war, freedom, prejudice, the rights of the creator and the created, and even the proper limits on magic are all possibilities. Artificial beings in folklore, fiction, television, and movies—the Jewish golem tales; *I, Robot* and *The Wizard of Oz*; *Star Trek*; and *Blade Runner* among these—can be inspirational for roleplaying warforged and employing them in a D&D campaign.

Paragon Paths

Although not restricted from other paragon paths, warforged can choose paths unique to their kind.

Warforged Juggernaut

"Outta my way, flesh bags!"

Prerequisites: Warforged, defender role

Having dedicated yourself to your construct and military nature, you've become a nearly unstoppable force. You relish the thought of rushing headlong into your enemies and driving them before you. If you choose to hold a position, you keep it. You can shake off damage and attacks that would crush your softer allies.

Warforged Juggernaut Path Features

Charging Action (11th level): If you charge on the action you gain from an action point, you receive a +2 bonus to speed and all defenses until the end of your next turn. In addition, whenever you charge, you can still take any unused actions after that charge.

Charging Strike (11th level): When you use the charge standard action, you deal +1d6 damage on a hit and push your enemy 1 square. You can then move into the space vacated by your enemy.

This bonus damage increases to +2d6 at 21st level.

Living Construct Perfection (16th level): You gain an additional +2 bonus to saving throws and to Endurance checks against disease. Whenever you spend an action point, you also gain a free saving throw against one effect on you.

Warforged Juggernaut Powers

Although martial in flavor, each of these powers has the same power source as that provided by the class that qualified you to enter this paragon path.

Ruinous Onslaught Warforged Juggernaut Attack 11

You end a reckless charge with a brutal blow that throws your enemy backward and rattles its nerves.

Encounter ✦ Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage, and the target is dazed until the end of your next turn. You can also push your enemy 1 square, and you can shift 1 square closer to a target you push.

Special: You can use this power in place of a melee basic attack as part of a charge.

Inexorable Momentum Warforged Juggernaut Utility 12

To attack your chosen adversary, you hurtle across the battlefield while ignoring all attacks.

Encounter
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: Until the end of your next turn, you ignore difficult terrain, you can move through enemy spaces, and you gain a +2 power bonus to AC against opportunity attacks. You must end your move in an unoccupied space. You gain these benefits when you charge or use any type of movement.

Crag of Steel Warforged Juggernaut Attack 20

You lock yourself into position, closing weak points in your armor and flailing your weapon in deadly arcs.

Daily ✦ Stance, Weapon
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You gain resist 5 to all damage, and whenever this reduces an attack's damage to 0, you also negate conditions and ongoing damage imposed by that attack. Additionally, you can reduce the distance of any pull, push, or slide effect against you by 5. Any enemy that starts its turn adjacent to you takes 1[W] damage, as long as you are able to make opportunity attacks.

Warforged Lifeseeker

"I embrace life, living as an example to others."

Prerequisites: Warforged, leader role

You value the unique living aspect of your nature so highly, and study what it means to be alive so deeply, that you have become an expert on these subjects. Embracing your emotions and the needs of living, as well as those of others, you grow to understand life better than those who take it for granted. These insights work through your magical being, making you a better leader and healer.

Warforged Lifeseeker Path Features

Healing Action (11th level): When you spend an action point to take an extra action, you or an ally that can see you regains a number of hit points equal to the higher of your Wisdom modifier or Charisma modifier.

Social Savant (11th level): You gain a +1 bonus to Wisdom-based skills and checks, as well as Charisma-based skills and checks.

Empathic Bond (16th level): Any time a power you use heals an ally, you also regain a number of hit points equal to the higher of your Wisdom modifier or Charisma modifier.

Warforged Lifeseeker Powers

Despite their mystic nature, each of these powers has the same power source as that provided by the class that qualified you to enter this paragon path.

Verve Strike Warforged Lifeseeker Attack 11

Swearing by your existence, you smite your enemy, dazing him and rallying an ally's spirit.

Encounter ✦ Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature within your melee reach.
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage and the target is dazed until the end of your next turn. You also grant yourself or an ally within 10 squares of you that you can see a number of temporary hit points equal to 5 + the higher of your Wisdom modifier or Charisma modifier.

Empathic Resonance Warforged Lifeseeker Utility 12

When you successfully withstand an attack's lasting effects, your allies find it easy to follow your example.

Daily
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, you gain a +2 bonus to saving throws. Whenever you succeed on a saving throw, one ally of your choice within 10 squares of you can make a saving throw against an effect of his or her choice immediately (as long as a save can end the effect). This effect persists until the end of the encounter or for 5 minutes.

Unleashed Vigor Warforged Lifeseeker Attack 20

You sunder the ties of your foe's life force, invigorating you and your allies.

Daily ✦ Healing, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage and ongoing 10 damage (save ends). *Aftereffect:* Ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Miss: Half damage and ongoing 5 damage (save ends).
Effect: Each time your target takes ongoing damage from this power, you or one ally of your choice within 5 squares of the target regains 5 hit points.

Equipment

Warforged use equipment much as other races do, but every warforged gains some special advantages when using items specifically designed as warforged components. Components can be attached or embedded. A warforged can have only one component, attached or embedded, in each of its arms, back, chest, feet, hands, head, hips, legs, and neck. It can also attach rings. A component doesn't take up the magic item slot of the same type, unless it is a magic item that goes in that slot. Within the parameters discussed here, what you can and can't attach or embed is ultimately for your DM to decide.

A nonmagical item can be fashioned as a warforged component for no additional cost. Modifying a magic item this way requires the *enchant magic item* ritual, but like resizing armor, reshaping the item has no component cost. If you use *enchant magic item* to resize magic armor, you can alter it to be a component as part of the same ritual—you needn't use the ritual twice.

Attached Components

Attached components are fastened to your body in such a way that, as long as you're conscious, they can only be removed if you want them to be. Such an item cannot be taken from you, and you can't accidentally drop it. You sense if such an item is damaged. Unless otherwise specified, affixing an attached component to you takes the same amount of time as it would for another character to draw and/or ready such an object.

Any item can become a component item or be found as one. Your DM decides if an item he or she places in an adventure is a component item, and you can craft these items as normal. Making an item a component item does not increase its cost or level.

Armor: Attaching the armor to your body partially mitigates the weight of the armor. Attached

Designing the Warforged

Those familiar with the warforged of 3rd Edition no doubt notice considerable changes to the race for 4th Edition. These changes were introduced because of a change in design philosophy, as well as an outgrowth of other parts of the system.

✦ 4th Edition PC races are tougher compared to 3rd Edition ones. Most have great, thematic racial features with no negative racial ability score adjustments and few disadvantages. The fact that the warforged has bonuses to two abilities in the same defense category (Fortitude), like the eladrin (Reflex), is part of balancing the race's capabilities.

✦ Constructs no longer have assumed immunities, resistances, and weaknesses. Since that's true, warforged don't need to account for those features of constructs. That makes balancing the race easier without automatically imposing constraints. We can assume, for example, that a warforged can be affected by poison and disease—it has living components and a circulatory system. The story behind the race is also structured to account for this.

✦ Riffing on the idea of an enduring, artificial being doesn't mean we have to meet all real-world or sci-fi expectations. Sure, warforged are like robots or androids, but warforged are neither of these. The theme lets us play with their toughness, ability to shake off certain effects, and other humanlike traits without feeling like we have to meet an arbitrary "robotic ideal."

This means the base warforged race is easier to use and grasp, but it doesn't mean they come with everything one might expect from an artificial entity. In fact, like other 4th Edition races, the warforged is only a translation of the warforged from 3rd Edition. It's meant to give a nod to the past, keeping the core idea behind a race, while moving into the future of the D&D game.

For instance, later in the design process of 4th Edition, we discovered that racial AC bonuses, even if small, conflict with armor and treasure. It's better for the game if you, the player, can use the nifty armor you buy or find. If your race's natural armor doesn't stack with that armor, what's the point of having it? So, with the assumption that any plating a warforged has is like skin to a human, it's easy to come to the place warforged are at now.

armor is considered to weigh only three-fourths its normal weight for determining your load.

Shield: With a heavy shield attached to you, your shield hand can hold items as if the shield were light. An attached light shield offers no additional special benefit.

Weapon: One-handed weapons and all crossbows make fine attached components. Such a component covers the weapon hand, so you have to remove the weapon before you can use that hand for another task.

An attached two-handed crossbow still requires two hands to use with maximum accuracy, but the crossbow covers only one hand. However, you can shoot an attached crossbow without using an additional hand to brace the weapon. You take a -2 penalty to attack rolls when doing so.

A two-handed melee weapon can be attached to both hands, but doing so restricts your movement with the weapon, making it less effective. You take a -2 penalty to attack rolls with an attached two-handed melee weapon.

Implement: As long as it remains prominently visible, a holy symbol can be attached to any spot on your body. An orb can be attached in your chest like a jewel, or attached to a hand like a weapon. A rod, staff, or wand can be attached like a weapon. You take no attack roll penalty for using an attached staff as an implement.

Light Source: You can have a slot in your body capable of holding a torch, sunrod, lantern, or other lighting device. Such an attached component provides light while leaving your hands free.

Storage: Your backpack and other storage devices—such as pouches, weapons sheaths, or a quiver—can be attached, making them easier to hang on to and harder to steal.

Tools: Little tools, such as thieves' tools, can be attached. Retrieving an attached tool is a free action. You can attach a larger tool for use in the same way you'd attach a weapon.

Magic Items: Items for any slot can be attached. Those already detailed follow the more specific rules above. Wondrous items can be attached, especially those that fall into categories described above. Some items are specifically designed to be attached components.

Warsoul Weapon — Level 3+

When this weapon is attached, you strike with superior speed and agility.

Lvl 3	+1	680 gp	**Lvl 18**	+4	85,000 gp
Lvl 8	+2	3,400 gp	**Lvl 23**	+5	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	+3	17,000 gp	**Lvl 28**	+6	2,125,000 gp

Weapon: Any one-handed melee weapon
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus
Special: Only a warforged character can use this weapon. It is always a component weapon.
Property: +2 bonus to initiative checks.
Power (Daily): Immediate Reaction. Use in response to an adjacent enemy's shift. Make a melee basic attack against that enemy with this weapon.

Armbow — Level 3+

This magic crossbow attaches to your arm as a warforged component.

Lvl 3	+1	680 gp	**Lvl 18**	+4	85,000 gp
Lvl 8	+2	3,400 gp	**Lvl 23**	+5	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	+3	17,000 gp	**Lvl 28**	+6	2,125,000 gp

Weapon: Crossbow
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus
Special: Only a warforged character can use this weapon. It is always a component weapon.
Power (At-will): Free action while the *armbow* is attached or embedded. The bow creates a bolt. This reduces load time to a free action with this crossbow. The bolt disappears 1 round after it is fired from the *armbow* or removed from it.

Embedded Components

Embedded components work, except as described here, like attached components. They're inserted to your body in such a way that they're almost a part of you. Most equipment isn't implanted in this way, because the item in question is too big or doing so is more of a hindrance than an advantage.

The major advantage of some embedded components is that they can be hard to distinguish from your body. Those embedded components that don't need to remain visible can be hidden within your body. Perception checks to locate such items on you take a -5 penalty. Affixing or removing an embedded component requires a standard action that provokes an opportunity attack.

Weapon: A dagger, shortsword, katar, or hand crossbow can be embedded. Up to five shurikens can be embedded in place of one of these items.

A retractable weapon can be embedded to take up space in one arm and hand. Such a weapon springs forth and locks into place as a minor action, and it can be retracted as a minor action. It functions normally with the Quick Draw feat.

Implement: An orb can be embedded and hidden in your chest, or like a weapon. Rods and wands can be embedded and hidden in your arm and still function, leaving your hands free for other tasks. These two implements can instead be embedded like weapons.

Storage: A storage device the size of a belt pouch or katar sheath, or something smaller, can be embedded and hidden. Embedded storage containers can only be opened by you or with your permission while you're conscious.

Tools: Tools as large as or smaller than a dagger can be embedded and hidden. A kit of such tools counts as one item.

Magic Items: Items that are like jewelry, such as rings, amulets, and similar neck items, as well as simple circlets and comparable head items, are the most easily embedded and hidden. Most other items

can be attached only. Some items are specifically designed to be embedded components.

Delver's Light — Level 2

Often attached to the forehead or chest, this magic gem gives off light powered by your life force.

Wondrous Item 520 gp
Special: Only a warforged character can use this item.
Property: While you're alive, the gem glows with the light of a sunrod. You can make it give off only dim light, or snuff its light altogether, as a free action.

Final Messenger — Level 6

This warforged communication device is built to resemble a small winged animal, but you can make out an intricate assemblage of clockwork amid its fine wings.

Wondrous Item 1,800 gp
Special: Only a warforged character can use this item.
Power (Daily): Standard Action. You implant a destination, a target recipient, an image of what you currently see, and a brief statement (5 seconds) into the messenger. Thereafter, you can activate the messenger as a free action. When you do so, the messenger flies to the destination and seeks the recipient. If you're slain, the messenger launches as an immediate reaction on its part, adding the last thing you saw to its pictures, and adding to its message that you have been destroyed.

The messenger has Initiative +9, darkvision, a fly speed of 8, defenses of 18, and 20 hit points, but it has no combat ability. It has only 8 hours worth of power. If it runs out of power, it becomes inert.

If the intended recipient is a warforged that can attach the messenger, the messenger plays back its contents even if it was rendered inert. Any warforged that isn't the intended recipient, but attaches an inert messenger and succeeds on a DC 20 Arcana check, can retrieve the messenger's message and pictures, as well as its intended destination and recipient. Even if the check fails, a warforged that can attach the messenger can recharge it in the space of a short rest.

Someone who makes a successful DC 25 Arcana check and spends a healing surge can unlock a messenger and make it play back its message and picture. If the same check beats DC 30, the messenger can be made to play back its intended destination and recipient.

Shoulderbow — Level 9+

Embedded in your back, this hidden hand crossbow springs to life at your whim.

Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	**Lvl 24**	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	**Lvl 29**	+6	2,625,000 gp
Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp			

Weapon: Hand crossbow
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus
Special: Only a warforged character can use this weapon. It is always a component weapon.
Property: This magic crossbow is attached to or embedded in your back. With a minor action, you can mentally command it to rise to a position on your shoulder. Once it's in position, you can fire a *shoulderbow* as a standard action by using a mental command and no hands at all. The *shoulderbow* generates its own ammunition. These bolts disappear 1 round after they are fired or removed from the bow.
Power (Daily): Minor action. Make a ranged basic attack with the *shoulderbow*.

Docents

A docent is a small platinum or mithral sphere studded with gems or, in Eberron, dragonshards. It has no apparent powers until you place it in your neck slot as a component, and then it comes to life. You decide when you affix it whether your docent is merely attached and visible, or completely embedded and hidden. You can change your mind later by removing the docent and reaffixing it.

As an intelligent item that is played as an NPC by the DM, a docent has the powers of another neck slot item, so DMs should choose a magic neck slot item and add its abilities to the docent. The docent is one level higher than a similar neck slot item that isn't a docent. In addition to its magic properties and powers, a docent has the following traits.

➤ It can communicate with you telepathically. If you wish, you can allow it to speak through you using your voice.

➤ It uses its telepathy to advise you. The docent's personality and alignment affect how it advises you. Unaligned docents, the most common, look out primarily for your well-being and advise you according to your tendencies. Otherwise aligned docents might have their own agendas.

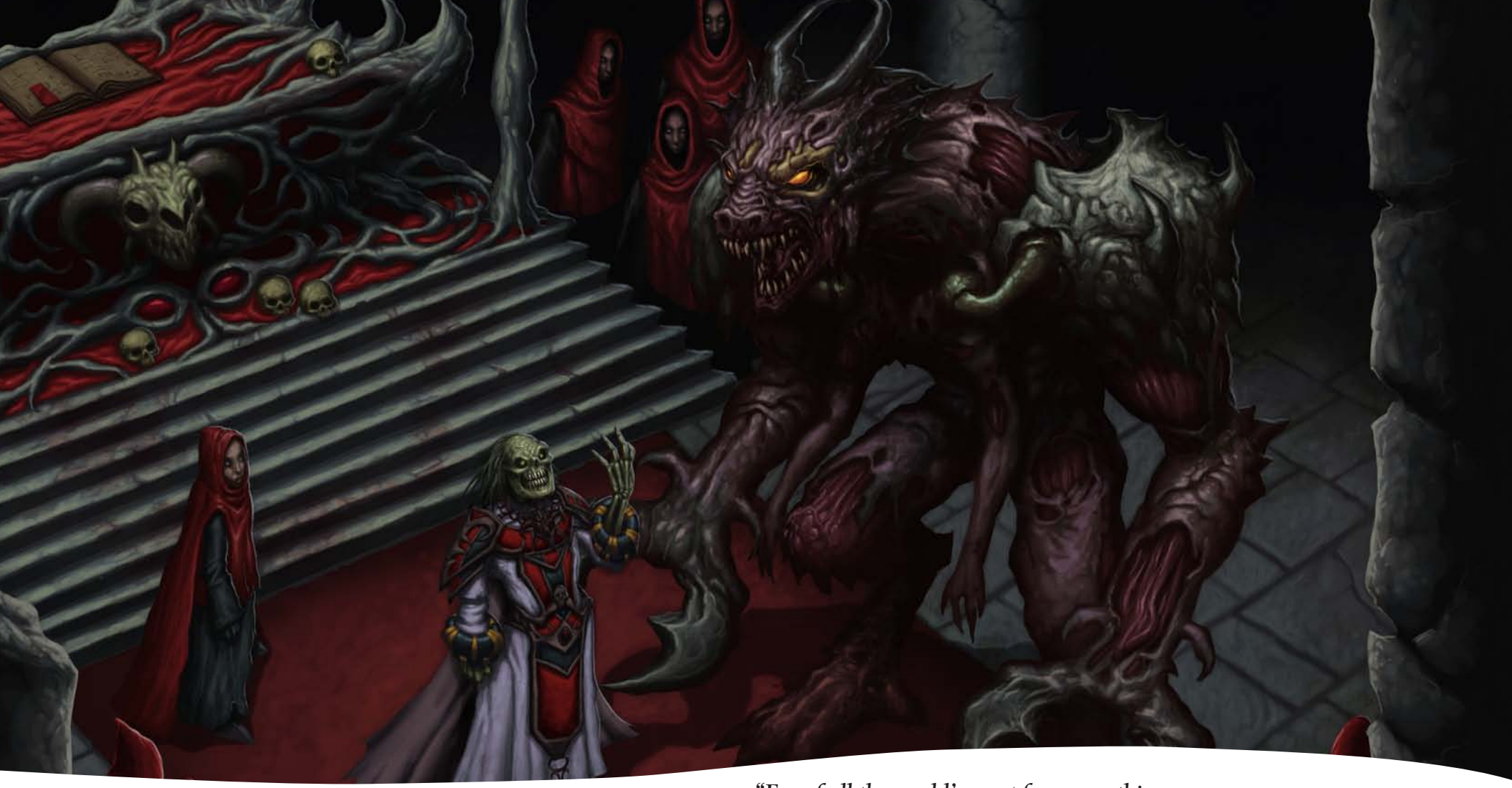
➤ A heroic tier docent is trained in one skill keyed to Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma. A paragon tier docent has two skills, and an epic tier docent has three. It can provide information from its skills or use a skill such as Diplomacy through you, if you allow it to speak using your voice. With any skill it knows, a docent makes checks using one-half its item level + 8. It can't make untrained checks.

➤ It understands Common and one other language, excluding secret languages. While attached or embedded, it can interpret for you any language it understands. If you allow it to speak using your voice, it can also translate your thoughts into a language it understands.

➤ Docents can have an alignment, personality quirks, extra powers, and any other traits ascribed to intelligent items or customized items in *Adventurer's Vault*.

About the Author

Chris Sims started out working for small d20 companies in 2003, then landed a freelance editor gig for Wizards RPG R&D. Wizards finally got annoyed enough by his constant applications to hire him as the *Duel Masters* editor in 2005. From there, Chris wheedled his way into RPG R&D as an editor, and finally became a story designer after masterminding a few choice assassinations. His credits include *Monster Manual V*, *Secrets of Sarlona*, *Rules Compendium*, and the *Eberron Survival Guide* (thanks, Logan!).



The Ashen Covenant

by Ari Marmell

illustrations by Dave Allsop

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"For of all the world's most fearsome things, the most dreadful by far is an empty grave."

THE MAJORITY OF CULTS dedicated to Orcus are, in a way, predictable evils. They seek destruction for its own sake, they collect innocent blood to slake their lord's thirst, and they possess his hatred for all life. Horrible, yes. Vile, absolutely. But these are localized evils, which are manageable in their own way. Once such a hidden cult has been unearthed, their goals and their methods can be anticipated. Others among the Prince of the Undead's cults are not so predictable, nor randomly wanton, in their violence. Focused and driven, they spread pain, violence, and undeath not out of sheer joy of carnage, but for purposes far darker. Of these, one of the worst is dubbed the Ashen Covenant.

Spearheaded by the zealous Elder Arantham, the Ashen Covenant is not a sect unto itself, but a movement growing in numbers throughout Orcus's cults. Followers of the Covenant—also called Grave-Speakers, Ash-Bearers, and Disciples of the Hollowed Grave—are driven by a single goal: to aid the ascension of their prince to the throne of the Raven Queen, and to help him gain sovereignty over all dead souls.

Through ancient magic and theologies, the Ashen Covenant seeks to fundamentally change the cycle of life. Undeath will no longer be an abomination, requiring the working of terrible necromancies, but the natural consequence of life. *Everyone* who dies will rise once more into a shambling undead existence. Orcus will supplant the Raven Queen because undeath will have supplanted death.

History of the Covenant

Little is known about Elder Arantham, founder of the Ashen Covenant movement. His followers know he was once a high priest in Bahamut's Church, and that he turned to Orcus after a crisis of faith, but beyond that, none can say.

Blessed of Orcus

Elder Arantham's notoriety began when he set out to uncover a copy of the ancient ritual that transforms apostate priests into foul undead creatures called huecuvas—not to punish, but to *voluntarily* subject agreement to the vile transformation. In a ceremony witnessed by his fellow cultists, Arantham shed the last of his humanity—and, as he proclaimed, "the last lingering stench of my prior misguided beliefs." Word of the priest's zealous embrace of undeath spread in whispers and hidden messages throughout Orcus's sects, and his cult swelled with new worshipers, their souls stirred by Elder Arantham's powerful sermons of Orcus's dark glory.

It was then that Arantham began first to focus his sermons less on Orcus and undeath in general, and more on the notion of Orcus's eventual and inevitable rise to the Raven Queen's throne—though he pursued the issue with less fervor than he would later display as part of the Ashen Covenant movement. Yet his ascension to undead was the first of Arantham's tributes to the Blood Lord. As his cult grew, the foul huecuva returned to the temple of Bahamut where he once served. There, in a bloodbath of mythic proportions, he not only massacred the entire priesthood but also raised them as shambling zombies, whom he then set loose upon the surrounding city.

Arantham's following tripled within the year. However, his efforts drew down the wrath of the city government and various religious orders, which put aside their differences to hunt the destroyer of Bahamut's temple. Several of Arantham's followers were captured, but none revealed their hidden shrine or the identity of their leader.

Arantham's actions also drew the attention of Holchwier, an undead glabrezu and exarch of Orcus. Appearing in a burst of fire before Arantham's cultists, Holchwier berated the priest, insisting that his activities were too overt and too great a threat to the survival of what was supposed to be a *hidden* cult.

Elder Arantham listened quietly and then, calm and polite as ever, invited the exarch to discuss the situation in a more private setting.

None can say what occurred behind those closed doors. And every cultist present watched, eyes wide, as Elder Arantham emerged from the meeting, his desiccated fingers coated in demonic blood. Holchwier, he proclaimed loudly, was a coward, unfit to serve the Prince of the Undead—and that he, Elder Arantham, would take his place as exarch.

The cultists waited for the wrath of Orcus to strike down their leader. When it never came, the notoriety of Elder Arantham, self-proclaimed exarch, grew further still, as did the size of his following.

The Covenant is Born

Having received inspiration from Orcus in dreams that came to him in the dark of night—despite the fact that undead do not sleep—Elder Arantham redoubled his focus on aiding the demon's ascent to the Raven Queen's domain. He preached long and eloquently about every worshiper's duty to aid in that goal, and he claimed that this should become the defining effort of *all* Orcus's cults.

Naturally, when word reached them, the leaders of other cults disagreed. But many of their followers were convinced, enough for Arantham's ideals to become the basis of a movement that would spread throughout the cults of Orcus. This was the birth of the Ashen Covenant—a compact, Arantham claimed, between Orcus and his followers that would change the natural order of the world.

The Coming Schisms

Today, the Ashen Covenant is one of the largest unified movements among Orcus's worshipers. It still lacks sufficient cohesion to break off into its own global sect—partly because its members are geographically scattered between the various cults, and partly because the various factions within the movement cannot agree on how best to accomplish their goals. And as more worshipers flock to Arantham's words, placing adherence to his teachings over loyalty to their own cult leaders, it can only be a matter of time until the Ashen Covenant becomes a world-spanning entity all its own.

Yet even as it borders on independence, the Covenant faces a potential schism of its own. The warlord Mauglurien, leader of the Ebon Riders, has grown dissatisfied with Elder Arantham's leadership. Though not so powerful or charismatic as the huecuva, the warlord has followers of his own—and as his philosophies gain more support, his faction grows ever nearer the day when it must split from the Ashen Covenant. When that happens, none can say if the

differences between the two factions will erupt in sectarian warfare—but given the chaotic and bloodthirsty nature of those involved, it seems likely indeed.

The Covenant's Goals

The Covenant seeks to elevate Orcus to the Raven Queen's throne by changing the natural order of the world itself. In Elder Arantham's vision, undeath is the natural end to life. All creatures that die would rise again—not due to necromantic rituals, or planar conjunction with the Shadowfell, but naturally.

It's a lofty goal, if a demented one, and not easy to achieve. In fact, the Ashen Covenant is split into numerous subsects along philosophical lines, as its members argue over what method might best accomplish this objective. Elder Arantham has yet to choose one particular means as the Covenant's focus, instead allowing each faction to try to prove that their philosophy is most likely to succeed. Each philosophy is, perforce, based heavily on theology, speculation, and guesswork—though their adherents are only too happy to conduct whatever experiments are necessary to prove their point.

Divine Reanimation

One of the largest factions believes that they need slay the Raven Queen and reanimate her as an undead god. This, they claim, will allow undeath to replace death in the natural order—and even should it not, it would place the Raven Queen under Orcus's dominion.

Others argue that even if the Covenant had the power to do this, undeath is no guarantee that a god must bow to Orcus. Witness Vecna, they say. Yet those who believe seem convinced that, if slain and reanimated by disciples of the Blood Lord, the Raven Queen would prove a different case.

The loudest proponent of this theory is the dwarf death knight Mauglurien, leader of the Ebon Riders, whose anger that Arantham has not adopted this philosophy grows daily.

Planar Annexation

This theory suggests that Orcus would control all dead souls and replace death with undeath in the natural cycle, if he could annex the Shadowfell into his own Abyssal realm. They point out that numerous planes already overlap the natural world; if those "extrusions" could be stretched *through* the world, allowing the Elemental Chaos to form stronger bonds with the Shadowfell, then Orcus could flood the realm of the dead with his own undead and demons. Eventually, they claim, the sheer weight of Abyssal energy would drag the Shadowfell into permanent conjunction with Thanatos.

The spokesperson for those who adhere to this view is Khavra Akti, a female eladrin wizard with unhealthy fascination for all things related to death and necromancy.

New Genesis

A minority—and a growing one—of Covenant members, maintains that, as the gods only *shaped* the world, the Ash-Bearers must turn to the power of those who *created* it. They believe that only the primordials have the power to so fundamentally change the world, and that the Covenant should be seeking primordial-created magic from the dawn of time, or else hunting for means to manipulate the surviving primordials themselves. With such power at their fingertips, even the gods could not stop them from reshaping reality as they see fit.

The leading voice for this philosophy is Shonvurru, an undead marilith who is possibly the only member of the Covenant with power on par with Elder Arantham.

Extortion

Many Grave-Speakers believe that the simplest path is to find something that even the gods fear and *force* them to change the world. This movement has not grown since its inception, since its members cannot agree on what, exactly, would strike such terror into the gods. Nevertheless, the idea continues to thrive.

Sithas Tyrr, a human paladin of the Blood Lord, spearheads the followers of this philosophy.

Weight of Numbers

Perhaps the most straightforward of the Covenant's competing philosophies is based on the notion that the best way to change the world is, well, to change the world. They believe that if the undead ever outnumber the truly dead, the "weight of reality" will tip, with undeath replacing death.

Straightforward, perhaps, but hardly easy. None can honestly say how many sentient beings have lived and died since the dawn of history; it might be an impossible task, by the numbers. Nevertheless, the faction focuses their efforts on animating undead in unprecedented numbers.

By far the most outspoken proponent of this theory is the "Mad Animator" Kielno Varim, a tiefling warlock.

Quests and Adventure Hooks

The following adventure hooks serve to introduce the Ashen Covenant to a campaign, and showcase the sorts of ways the different factions go about attempting to achieve their philosophical goals.

The Plague of Empty Graves (Minor Quest, Suggested Level 4): During the chaos and tumult of the battle, the PCs must ensure that a specific person is safe and alive over the course of the bloody night.

Hook: One of the PCs has friends or relatives in the town.

Starting the Quest: The adventure begins when the PCs spend the night in a small village. Not long after nightfall, a strange mist rises. Screams draw the PCs outside, where they find skeletons and zombies attacking the townsfolk. Although the PCs can save some, they quickly realize that the undead number far too many to be defeated; the town's *entire graveyard* has awakened. Even worse, every individual slain rises again in a matter of moments to join the murderous horde. The PCs must attempt to survive the night, for the undead all depart come morning.

Possible Outcomes: After the battle, the PCs may choose to follow up on discovering the source of the necromantic mist (see below). If not, as they travel, they may run into other towns that have been destroyed by undead creatures.

The Necromantic Mist (Major Quest, Suggested Level 4): Destroy the source of the necromantic mist.

Hook: If the PCs do not choose to follow up on the Plague of Empty Graves quest, one of the town's survivors—a priest, perhaps, or local elder—begs them to ensure that this effect does not repeat itself, and that no other towns are destroyed in this fashion. He even offers to seek support from the churches in the nearest major community (a few days distant) in raising a reward for them to do so.

Starting the Quest: The PCs can choose to follow the tracks of the undead who have shambled out of the town, or perhaps they discover that one of the surviving townsfolk is a cultist here to observe how the mist works.

Possible Outcomes: Upon deciding to follow up on the necromantic mist, PCs can eventually learn that a small cadre of Orcus-worshipers is behind these events. Members of Kielno Varim's faction of the Ashen Covenant have developed a necromantic mist that causes all corpses within to rise. The PCs must discover the magic they are using to create this mist and destroy it. Otherwise, the cult continues to wipe out village after village in their never-ending quest to expand the range and effectiveness of the mist.

The Flood of Shadows (Minor Quest, Suggested Level 8): Discover what form of magic or curse plagues the coastal city and find out where several missing people have gone.

Hook: The PCs doubtless have attained a measure of local fame by this level. Representatives of the community seek them out, begging them to help figure out why the community is experiencing such trouble recently.

Starting the Quest: A highland community is experiencing a multitude of problems. A terrible storm has blown in from the coast, and it has been pounding the community with battering rains, fearsome winds, and deafening thunder for several days. Even stranger, and far more disturbing, is the fact that people have been noting a number of disappearances. Some locals have vanished in the middle of performing their daily activities (or what daily activities are still possible within the storm). Many others who have *not* vanished have reported strange, eerie sensations to the town's guards and the local churches. They claim that they walked through areas of soul-numbing cold, worse than that caused by the storm. In them, they say, the community has strangely shifted; buildings move or do not exist at all, streets lead to places they should not, and even the storm is absent in these areas.

What's happening is that Khavra Akti's faction of the Covenant is taking advantage of a rare planar phenomenon to test some theories. The intense storm is the result of a conjunction between the real world and the Elemental Chaos. Using weather control rituals, the Grave-Speakers have directed it here, where the borders between the world and the Shadowfell lightly touch. By empowering the tie with a ritual, they hope to create a better link to Tempest.

Possible Outcomes: The PCs might prevent Khavra Akti's current scheme from coming to full fruition by disrupting the long ritual and dealing with those she had sent to accomplish this goal. Additionally, while the PCs investigate the missing PC aspect, they can find out that these people are in the Shadowfell. In this latter case, see Beyond the Storm below.

Beyond the Storm (Major Quest, Suggested Level 8): Go after the missing people and return them to their homes.

Hook: In the course of their other activities here, an ally begs the PCs to locate a particular missing person. Their earlier investigation into the storm (see The Flood of Shadows above) allowed them to discover that the missing people are in the Shadowfell, so now the PCs must enter the Shadowfell and search the haunted lands to find those who have disappeared. Only a few survivors remain, hiding from the dangers of this dark plane. The PCs must locate them and escort them back.

Possible Outcomes: Once the PCs bring back the survivors, they are rewarded with the gratitude of the community and the relatives of those they bring back. If not, the community deals with the loss as best it can.

Beneath the Skin of Earth (Major Quest, Suggested Level 15): Win the duke's contest.

Hook: An eccentric duke, know for his collection of historical relics, has announced a great contest. For centuries, legends have told of an ancient treasure hidden in the caves beneath the volcanic Mt. Phyros. The team that succeeds in locating it will receive a 18,000-gp reward and full access to the duke's private collection and library. (You can work this into an ongoing campaign by placing a piece of information for which the PCs have been hunting into the duke's collected writings.)

Starting the Quest: After entering the contest, the PCs delve into the volcanic caves, dealing with natural hazards, native monsters—with a strong elemental bent—and rival teams, some of whom are not above sabotage or assassination.

Possible Outcomes: When they finally reach the conclusion of their trek, the PCs discover a great humanoid form, bent back in an agonized posture and entombed in solid and red-hot rock. Right then, they are attacked by a band of Ashen Covenant assassins, who have been following the teams, waiting for one to succeed so that they might kill them for the prize.

This entire contest was set up by Shonvurru's faction, who enticed the duke's daughter into joining them and then threatened her life to ensure his cooperation. They believe that the figure beneath Mt. Phyros is one of the great primordials. (Whether this is the case is entirely up to the needs of your campaign.) They used others—including the PCs—to face the dangers of reaching him, and now they intend to free him in exchange for his aid. The PCs can learn this by questioning the assassins, or by returning to the surface and investigating the duke's apparent double-cross (see The Motives of Others).

The Motives of Others (Minor Quest, Suggested Level 15): Figure out why the duke set up the contest and follow through on any discoveries made.

Hook: Even if the PCs themselves aren't curious (and vindictive) enough to investigate who betrayed them, some of their rivals—not those who sabotaged the PCs, but a more honorable team—ask the PCs' help in avenging their fallen members.

Starting the Quest: If the PCs confront the duke, he breaks down and admits the plight of his daughter. He begs the PCs to rescue her, promising to make good on the contest reward if they do so.

Possible Outcomes: If the PCs rescue the duke's daughter, she unfortunately isn't exactly happy about it since she still believes in Shonvurru's cause, but the duke follows through on any promises he made regarding both the contest and the return of his daughter. If not, he honors the terms of the contest, and thanks the PCs for attempting to help him. The daughter isn't happy with Shonvurru, either, and she may be a good source of information to the PCs regarding Shonvurru's faction in the future.

Other Quests

For higher-level uses of the Covenant, consider the following possibilities. These are presented in abbreviated form both for space reasons, and because they work best when tailored specifically for your campaigns, with bits of these storylines appearing amid and between other adventures.

Dead Kings (Major Quest, Suggested Level 20): The Ashen Covenant has dispatched over a dozen "assassination and animation" teams. Each is assigned a powerful and knowledgeable target—a high priest, a mayor, a sage, and even a king. Their objective is to slay and reanimate the target as an undead under their control. They know that they must be discovered eventually, but hope in the interim to use their pawns' authority and resources to locate more useful tomes, rituals, and artifacts. Their efforts might place untold power in the hands of the cult, and send the region spiraling into chaos when the rulers' deaths are discovered.

Words of Power (Major Quest, Suggested Level 23): Orcus once possessed the Last Word, an ancient utterance powerful enough to slay even deities. Although the gods eventually rendered the power of the Last Word null, legend states that the Blood Lord found other magic, nearly as powerful, in the ruins where he found the Last Word. The PCs might engage operatives of either Mauglurien's or Sithas Tyrr's faction, across numerous wastelands and through multiple planes, on their hunt for this powerful magic.

The Covenant's Leaders

The Ashen Covenant doesn't have an internal ranking structure, since it has yet to claim its own identity as an independent entity. Rather, its members wield whatever authority their ranks and positions in their own cults provide them. Several members, however, wield great power, and are held in great esteem, by all who follow the Grave-Speakers' teachings.

Elder Arantham (Human Cleric Huecuva) — **Level 23 Elite Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) — XP 10,200

Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +17; darkvision
Deathless Fanaticism aura 10; allies reduced to 0 hit points in this aura make a melee basic attack at a +2 attack bonus against an enemy within reach.
HP 412; **Bloodied** 206
Regeneration 10 (damage from silver weapons negates Arantham's regeneration until the end of his next turn)
AC 40; **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 40 (44 when targeted with charm and fear attacks)
Immune disease; **Resist** 15 necrotic
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Unholy Touch (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+26 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 6 necrotic damage and ongoing 10 necrotic damage, and when the target of this attack takes ongoing necrotic damage, all adjacent creatures take 5 necrotic damage (save ends both).

Unholy Glare (minor; at-will) ✦ **Gaze, Necrotic**
Ranged 10; +27 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 6 necrotic damage and ongoing 10 necrotic damage, and when the target of this attack takes ongoing necrotic damage, all adjacent creatures take 5 necrotic damage (save ends both).

Killing in the Name (standard; recharge ⚁ ⚂)
Close burst 5; up to three allies in burst make a melee basic attack. The attack is made with a +2 bonus and deals an extra 2d6 damage.

Dying for the Cause (immediate interrupt, when Elder Arantham takes damage; recharge ⚁ ⚂)
Requires an adjacent ally. The ally is reduced to 0 hit points. Arantham takes no damage from the triggering attack.

Healing Word (minor 1/round; 3/encounter) ✦ **Healing**
Ranged 15; a single ally can spend a healing surge to regain its surge value plus 6d6 + 6 hit points.

Return to Sanctum (standard action, while bloodied only; daily) ✦ **Teleportation**
Arantham teleports himself and one ally within 5 squares to a prepared location within 1 mile.

Second Wind (standard; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
Arantham spends a healing surge and regains 103 hit points. Arantham gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the start of his next turn.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common, Primordial
Skills Arcana +18, Diplomacy +22, History +18, Insight +22, Religion +18

Str 13 (+12)	**Dex** 13 (+12)	**Wis** 22 (+17)
Con 14 (+13)	**Int** 14 (+13)	**Cha** 22 (+17)

Equipment +6 *holy symbol*, scale armor

Elder Arantham

The founder of the Ashen Covenant movement, as well as the high priest of his own Orcus cult, Elder Arantham is a figure of grotesque mystery. A passionate and charismatic speaker, he can stoke the fires of fanaticism in his followers to a conflagration of unprecedented levels. Everyone in the Covenant, and indeed nearly all who have heard of him, acknowledge his claim to the title of exarch, for he does indeed appear to commune with the Blood Lord.

And if Doresain represents the cannibalistic and consumptive side of undeath, and Vermiturge the connection between undeath and plague, then this newest exarch represents the eternal patience of the undead, who have a true eternity to achieve even the most intricate of long-term goals.

Tactics

Elder Arantham prefers to fight from a distance, using his *unholy glare* to smite and divide the foes of Orcus while he urges his allies with *killing in the name*. That said, if a foe particularly angers him, or if he feels confident in his supremacy, the desiccated priest enjoys the feel of mortal flesh withering beneath his touch. Arantham is careful to keep allies near him, both to take advantage of the control his touch and glare offer and to keep him alive through *dying for the cause*, which consumes both minions and near-death comrades with equal effectiveness.

Arantham and one ally within 5 squares of him can escape through teleportation to a prepared location within 1 mile, which he uses if outmatched. Though he rarely shows overt anger, even when

thwarted, the huecuva holds his grudges eternally. Anyone who forces him to experience the shame of running can expect repercussions to come.

Elder Arantham is a master of rituals. Assume that he has access to any common ritual necessary for whatever schemes he undertakes.

Prepared Location and Return to Sanctum

By way of a special ritual that Elder Arantham keeps secret, he can create a special prepared area for his *return to sanctum* power. Elder Arantham can only have one sanctum active at a time (when he creates a new one, the old one loses its connection to Elder Arantham), and he can only use the power when he is bloodied, but does not hesitate to do so if he is in danger.

Description

Arantham appears tall from a distance, but this is due to his slender build and skeletal form; he's of roughly average height. The priest is entirely skeletal, with barely a trace of flesh remaining on his body. He still has hair atop his head that is a stiff and faded gray somewhere between the hair of a dying person and a clump of moss. His eye sockets gleam with an inner gray-green light; his bones have the faintest sickly green tinge to them, and his teeth are perfectly white.

Elder Arantham wears a ceremonial robe of snowy white hue, trimmed in the traditional black and red of Orcus. When going into battle, he wears a shirt of scale atop it. An amulet of black wrought iron, bent into the shape of a horned skull, hangs from his neck.

Roleplaying Elder Arantham

Arantham is absolutely ruthless when attempting to achieve his goals. He lacks anything remotely approaching a sense of empathy; the suffering of others is meaningless to him—it is neither good nor bad, but necessary. There is no act he will not undertake, no evil he will not commit, if doing so brings him one step nearer to his goals, or advances the cause of Orcus and the Ashen Covenant.

He is a devout believer in Orcus's teachings and the superiority of the undead over the living. He revels in his undead state and his lack of humanity, and he looks forward to the day that he can finally change the natural order, and share this gift with all living creatures. Nothing is more important to him than the ultimate achievement of the Covenant's goals.

Yet for all that, he sees himself as a true religious and community leader, with a responsibility to his flock. To other undead, and to the living beings who are part of his cult and his movement, he can be patient, even kind. He makes time to meet with them, to advise them on their problems, to celebrate their victories. He would turn on any of them in an instant if his goals mandated it, or if they proved themselves unworthy, but he does see them as his wards, and not just his pawns.

He almost never loses his temper—at least overtly. He might be seething inside, and he shares the capacity for violent rage with his demonic lord, but it hardly ever shows in his voice or what's left of his face. He appears calm and controlled, even when he is not.

Elder Arantham Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Religion check.

DC 25: Elder Arantham is an undead priest of Orcus, held in high esteem by worshipers throughout many of the demon lord's different cults. He is said to be an exarch of the Blood Lord, and he is taking steps to coordinate and direct the actions of many of his formerly disorganized worshipers.

DC 30: Elder Arantham is a rare form of divinely empowered undead known as a huecuva.

DC 35: Everything presented in the History of the Covenant section, except for the parts about the growing schism with Mauglurien's Ebon Riders, is known.

Encounter Groups

Elder Arantham is rarely alone. Even when he travels outside his shrine, he does so with an entourage.

Level 24 Encounter (XP 30,650)

- Elder Arantham (level 23 elite controller)
- 6 abyssal ghoul myrmidons (level 23 minion)
- 3 advanced slaughter wights (level 21 brute)
- 1 vampire (formerly elf) warlock (level 21 artillery)

Mauglurien, the Black Dragon

Named for his dark beard, dark armor, and dark temperament, the so-called "Black Dragon" is a warleader in the service of Orcus, and the master of a mercenary company known as the Ebon Riders. In truth, the Ebon Riders are a cult of the Blood Lord, using their position as soldiers-for-hire as an excuse to shed blood in Orcus's name, and earn a bit of coin in the process. The true nature of the Ebon Riders is a well-kept secret, allowing the company to serve in conflicts where worshipers of Orcus would be eschewed by both sides.

Mauglurien and the Ebon Riders can function even in a campaign or adventure not focused on the Ashen Covenant. Their practice of taking mercenary contracts allows them to show up in any conflict you choose, regardless of its connections—or lack thereof—to Orcus or his cults. Similarly, conflict with the Ebon Riders is a good way to slowly introduce other aspects of the Ashen Covenant into the campaign, as the PCs learn more about their foe.

Mauglurien (Death Knight Dwarf Warlord) **Level 20 Elite Soldier (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 5,600

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision, low-light vision
Marshal Undead aura 10; lower-level undead creatures gain +2 bonus to attack rolls.
HP 356; **Bloodied** 178
AC 37; **Fortitude** 36, **Reflex** 33, **Will** 34
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 15 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 5
Action Points 1

Boneshredder (standard; at will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
+26 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 damage, plus 5 necrotic damage (plus an extra 2d10 + 4d12 damage on a crit).

Hammer and Black Anvil (standard; at will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
+24 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 5 damage, plus 5 necrotic damage (plus an extra 2d10 + 4d12 damage on a crit). On hit, on ally adjacent to target makes a melee basic attack with a +1 bonus to damage against it as a free action.

Unholy Flames (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞⁞) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
Close burst 2; +22 vs. Reflex; 6d8 + 4 necrotic and fire damage to all living creatures; undead creatures within the burst (including Mauglurien) deal an extra 2d6 fire damage with melee attacks until the end of Mauglurien's next turn.

Inspiring Word (minor 1/round; 3/encounter) ✦ **Healing**
Ranged 10; a single ally can spend a healing surge to regain its surge value plus 4d6 hit points.

Shadow Weapon (minor; recharge ⁞⁞⁞)
Mauglurien's melee attacks target Reflex instead of AC until the start of his next turn.

Second Wind (standard; minor) ✦ **Healing**
Mauglurien spends a healing surge and regains 89 hit points. Mauglurien gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the start of his next turn.

Stand Your Ground
When an effect forces a dwarf to move—through a pull, a push, or a slide—the dwarf moves 1 square less than the effect specifies. When an attack would knock the dwarf prone, the dwarf can roll a saving throw to avoid falling prone.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common, Dwarven
Skills Athletics +20, Diplomacy +16, Dungeoneering +15, Endurance +21, Intimidate +16
Str 21 (+15) **Dex** 12 (+11) **Wis** 17 (+13)
Con 18 (+14) **Int** 15 (+12) **Cha** 13 (+11)
Equipment *Boneshredder* (*+4 vicious battleaxe,* soul weapon), light shield, plate armor

Tactics

The Black Dragon's tactics are straightforward enough: charge into combat and stay there until the only remnants left of his foes are bits of flesh, blood, and bone on the ground.

This doesn't mean that Mauglurien is a mindless combatant, though many dead warriors made the mistake of thinking so. The death knight is a canny fighter and a master tactician; he prefers direct confrontation to all other forms of interaction. He fights with allies at his side, giving them openings with *hammer and dark anvil*, giving their attacks greater weight with *unholy flames*, and keeping them at battle with his *inspiring word*.

Mauglurien prefers to fight mounted where possible. In battle, he rides a massive warhorse with hair as black as his armor, and he takes advantage of its capabilities as a mount. Rumor holds that the horse is demonic, an idea reinforced by the fact that the beast is carnivorous and sweats blood.

Description

Mauglurien has a traditional dwarf build: broad-shouldered and stocky. His hair and beard are a midnight black; the former is tied tightly back in a tail, but he allows the beard to hang wild. His armor is as dark as his hair and etched with draconic motifs. He never goes anywhere, or even so much as crosses a room, without the brutally jagged axe *Boneshredder* by his side.

The Black Dragon looks more alive than most death knights. Although his flesh has sunken around his bones, grown cracked and leathery, his undead nature is not blatant from a distance. The gleam in his eyes is a dull violet, invisible in even moderate lighting, and his beard hides the worst of the decay on his face. With only a bit of preparation and makeup, Mauglurien can pass as a living dwarf—albeit one who has clearly led a rough life—as long as he doesn't permit a detailed inspection.

Roleplaying Mauglurien

He lives for battle and bloodshed. For a time, he offered his allegiance other martial gods—first to Kord, then to Gruumsh. But none slaked his lust for both violence and power as did the unbridled ferocity of Orcus's cult. Now, he has developed a zealous devotion to Orcus that goes beyond his love of violence. He has truly come to believe in the demon- and undead-

dominated world Orcus offers, a belief that grew only stronger still with his transformation into a death knight.

Although his devotion to Orcus is deep and sincere, he does not frequently make overt displays of his faith. To those who don't know him, he acts like a typical (if powerful) warrior for hire, whose faith is of less importance than the opportunity to shed blood and earn gold. He is a big believer in organized combat, and he prefers fighting alongside warriors he knows he can count on to standing on his own.

He has a fierce temper and lashes out viciously at those who anger him. He does not believe in any such thing as a "minor insult." Someone is either on his good side, or his enemy. Although he greatly respects Elder Arantham's objectives, Arantham's refusal to see the wisdom in his own philosophies is slowly but surely moving the priest toward the status of "enemy." The time might come when the Ebon Riders—and all other Grave-Speakers who support his methods—might have to break away from Arantham's grasp.

Mauglurien Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful History check.

DC 20: Mauglurien, called the Black Dragon, is a powerful dwarf warlord. He leads a mercenary company called the Ebon Riders, a cadre of heavily armored soldiers willing to fight for anyone if the gold is sufficient.

DC 25: Whispered rumor tells that many of the inner circle of the Ebon Riders are undead—possibly even Mauglurien.

DC 30: Mauglurien is a death knight, and many of his lieutenants are death knights, wights, or vampires. Mauglurien and the Riders are dedicated not to one of the martial gods, but to the demon Orcus.

Encounter Groups

Mauglurien rarely travels alone, and he never enters combat alone if he can help it.

Level 22 Encounter (XP 21,400)

- Mauglurien (level 20 elite soldier)
- 3 slaughter wights (level 18 brute)
- 1 vampire (formerly human) fighter (level 18 elite soldier)
- 1 vampire (formerly human) cleric (level 18 elite controller)
- 1 nightmare (level 13 skirmisher)
- 5 warhorses (level 3 brute)

New Magic Items

Some of the following items were created by the Ashen Covenant or by other worshipers of Orcus. Others have no direct connection to the sect, but the Grave-Speakers collect them, either to make use of their abilities or to prevent others from using them.

Disrupting Weapon — Level 8+

Created in ancient days by priests of Pelor, this weapon is the bane of undead everywhere.

Lvl 8	+1	3,400 gp	**Lvl 23**	+4	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	+2	17,000 gp	**Lvl 28**	+5	2,125,000 gp
Lvl 18	+3	85,000 gp			

Weapon: Flail, Hammer, Mace
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 radiant damage per plus, *or* +1d10 radiant damage per plus against undead
Property: This weapon can be used as a holy symbol. It adds its enhancement bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls, and attacks can be augmented by this weapon's power when it is used as an implement. You do not gain your weapon proficiency to an attack roll when using a *disrupting weapon* as an implement.
Power (Daily ✦ Radiant): Free Action. Use this power when you hit an undead creature with this weapon. Deal +1d10 radiant damage per plus.

Wraithblade — Level 10+

The first of these weapons was built from the shattered blade of a sword wraith, though other techniques now work just as well.

Lvl 10	+2	5,000 gp	**Lvl 25**	+5	625,000 gp
Lvl 15	+3	25,000 gp	**Lvl 30**	+6	3,125,000 gp
Lvl 20	+4	125,000 gp			

Weapon: Light Blade
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus, and if you have the sneak attack class feature (whether granted by class or multiclass feat) you may apply your bonus sneak attack damage even if you have already done so this round or this encounter. Gaining sneak attack damage in this way does not count toward its use restriction.

Symbol of Turning — Level 4+

Clerics use this potent weapon to battle the undead.

Lvl 4	+1	840 gp	**Lvl 19**	+4	105,000 gp
Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	**Lvl 24**	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	**Lvl 29**	+6	2,625,000 gp

Implement (Holy Symbol)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 radiant damage per plus
Power (Daily): Standard Action. You must have the channel divinity class feature to use this power. Use *channel divinity: turn undead*, even if you've already used *channel divinity* in this encounter.

Staff of the Lich — Level 13+

The pale wood of this staff resembles polished bone.

Lvl 13	+2	17,000 gp	**Lvl 23**	+4	425,000 gp
Lvl 18	+3	85,000 gp	**Lvl 28**	+5	2,125,000 gp

Implement (Staff)
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 necrotic damage per plus
Power (Encounter): Free action. Use this power when using a power that has the necrotic keyword. After you resolve the power effect, choose a single target of the power. That target is immobilized until the end of your next turn.

Skull Helm Level 12+

The face of this iron helm resembles a screaming skull.

Lvl 12 13,000 gp
Body Slot: Head
Property: You gain a +2 item bonus to Intimidate and Endurance checks.
Power (Daily): Immediate Interrupt. You can use this power when an enemy makes an attack against your Will defense. Gain a +2 item bonus to Will until the end of your next turn. If the attack targeting you has the fear keyword, gain a +4 item bonus instead.

Ring of Invigoration Level 14

This dull iron ring is engraved with what appear to be a dire bear's paw print.

Body Slot: Ring 13,000 gp
Property: Gain a +2 item bonus to Endurance checks
Power (Daily; Healing): Not an action. When you're reduced to 0 hit points, you can spend a healing surge and regain your surge value in hit points.

Pouch of Ghost-Grounding Dust Level 15

This pouch never runs low on ghost-grounding dust.

Wondrous Item 25,000 gp
Power (Daily): Standard action. Pull a handful of dust from the pouch and throw it into the air (close blast 3). Creatures in the blast lose insubstantial and phasing (save ends).

New Monsters

Although the Ashen Covenant did not create these foul undead, all are present amid Orcus's cults, and some are among the ranks (or tools) of the Covenant.

Huecuva

Huecuvas are foul undead that are created by an ancient divine curse. Originally intended as punishment for a priest who horribly violates his vows and responsibilities, the rite is occasionally used by evil churches as a means of empowering their clerics. Those who suffer the curse as punishment lose most of their original personality and memories, living an exiled existence fraught with insanity, paranoid, and unrelenting self-doubt. Those who willingly accept the rite suffer no memory loss and gain unholy power, but their personalities shift even further toward evil and depravity.

Huecuva is a template you can apply to humanoid NPCs or monsters, though it works best with controllers and leaders. The huecuva is strongly divine in flavor, so it best fits NPC clerics or paladins. Though both are intended for divine characters, this template focuses more on divine powers than the mummy template, allowing them to coexist while creating different NPCs.

Prerequisite: Level 11, humanoid, Wisdom 13

Huecuva **Elite Controller or Soldier**
(undead) XP Elite

Senses Darkvision
Defenses +2 AC; +2 Fortitude; +0 Reflex; +4 Will
Saving Throws +2
Action Point 1
Immune disease
Resist 10 necrotic at 11th level, 15 necrotic at 21st level
Hit Points +8 per level + Constitution score
Regeneration 10 (Damage from silver weapons negates heacuva regeneration until the end of his next turn.)
Powers
Deathless Fanaticism aura 10
Allies in this aura make a melee basic attack with a +2 attack bonus when reduced to 0 hit points.
ǂ **Unholy Touch** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Level + 3 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + Charisma modifier necrotic damage, and ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends). When the target takes necrotic damage, all adjacent living creatures take 5 necrotic damage.

Ashgaunt

Appearing only recently in the dark corners of the world, the ashgaunt is an abomination that exists not merely to drain life—a hunger it shares with other wights—but also to raise other undead to create further havoc.

Ashgaunts are recent creations of the Ashen Covenant. Although disappointed in the ashgaunt initially—they'd wanted to create a creature capable of spawning multiple types of undead and were

disheartened when the ashgaunt maintained its creations for brief periods of time—they have since begun using the ashgaunts as soldiers and assassins. They continue to refine the process that created the ashgaunt, hoping to birth a similar creature that has animated allies that are permanent.

Description

This creature resembles other wights: a desiccated corpse with dark nails, shriveled features, and evil gleaming in its eyes. The ashgaunt's flesh is paler than that of its kinfolk, and it is often blotched with black, diseased patches. Careful examination reveals necromantic runes carved on the underside of its nails and scarred into the flesh of its tongue. Ashgaunts normally wear grave shrouds, but some dress as living people.

Ashgaunt	**Level 7 Soldier (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid (undead)	XP 300

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +4; darkvision
Grave Master aura 5; allied undead within the aura gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls and all defenses, +4 if the ashgaunt created the creature with its *wake the dead* ability.
HP 82; **Bloodied** 41
AC 25; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 20
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 15 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant
Speed 6

Claw (standard; at will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+14 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 necrotic damage and target is marked until the end of the ashgaunt's next turn.

Life Drain (standard; at-will) ✦ **Healing, Necrotic**
+12 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 5 necrotic damage; if target is marked, it also loses 1 healing surge and is immobilized (save ends). If the target has no healing surges the attack does extra damage equal to half the target's bloodied total. On a hit the ashgaunt regains 5 hit points.

Wake the Dead (minor action; ⚁ ⚂) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 20; target up to 4 destroyed undead creatures reduced to 0 hit points within range; the targets become zombie rotters (see *Monster Manual* 274), which fight on the behest of the ashguant until the end of the encounter or 5 minutes, whichever comes first. The zombie rotters rise as a free action, and act after the ashgaunt in the initiative order.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common

Str 20 (+8)	**Dex** 15 (+5)	**Wis** 12 (+4)
Con 18 (+7)	**Int** 16 (+6)	**Cha** 20 (+8)

Tactics

The ashgaunt enjoys melee and savors the fact that it can drain the life from its foes. It prefers to aid its allies with its aura, and it raises undead and position them tactically based on the terrain and the nature of its foes. Once it chooses to close with its foes, it has its allies clear a path by which it can move in on those who appear vulnerable to melee attacks (such as wizards or lightly armored strikers).

Ashgaunt Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Religion check.

DC 15: In addition to draining life, ashgaunts are capable of raising destroyed undead to fight for them.

DC 20: These foul creatures were created by a faction of Orcus-worshipers called the Ashen Covenant, some of whom are focused on finding new ways to spread undeath.

Encounter Groups

Ashgaunts work alongside other undead beyond those they can summon, and often enlist the aid of human cultists, who when they die, can serve the fight anew when awakened from the dead.

Level 8 Encounter (XP 1,850)

- 1 ashgaunt (level 7 soldier)
- 8 human lackeys (level 7 minion)
- 1 mad wraith (level 6 controller)
- 2 zombie hulks (level 8 brute)

Flameharrow

A rare form of undead often mistaken for a lich or skeleton, the flameharrow (sometimes referred to as an "eye of fear and flame") is an agent of utter chaos and wanton destruction. Although capable of intricate schemes and patient evil, it is most satisfied when wreaking pain and terror for the sheer joy of it.

Description

A flameharrow initially appears as little more than an emaciated figure in a tattered cloak, its face obscured by a ragged hood. Only when it enters combat, or when it seeks to terrify its victims, does it sweep back its hood with a bony hand to reveal a bare skull. A gleaming gem is set into each eye socket—one black, one red.

Flameharrow	**Level 12 Elite Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid (undead)	XP 1,400

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
Spiritual Inferno aura 5; undead allies in the aura gain resist 10 fire and deal ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends) in addition to the normal damage from their attacks.
HP 244; **Bloodied** 122
AC 28; **Fortitude** 25; **Reflex** 26; **Will** 27
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic, 15 fire; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, teleport 3
Action Points 1

Flameharrow Claw (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
+17 vs. AC; 1d10 + 5 fire damage, and the target can't spend healing surges until the end of the flameharrow's next turn.

Harrowing Gaze (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Fear, Gaze, Psychic**
One enemy within close blast 10; +17 vs. Will; 1d8 + 5 psychic damage, and target is pushed 4 squares. The target is dazed until the end of the flameharrow's next turn.

Deadfire Gaze (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Gaze, Necrotic**
Close blast 5; +17 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 6 necrotic damage plus ongoing 5 fire damage and the target is immobilized (save ends both).

Death's Salvation (immediate interrupt when an undead ally is reduced to 0 hit points; recharge ⚁ ⚂ ⚀) ✦ **Healing**
Range 10; targeted undead ally regains 15 hit points.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common

Str 15 (+8)	**Dex** 16 (+9)	**Wis** 15 (+8)
Con 17 (+9)	**Int** 18 (+10)	**Cha** 21 (+11)

Tactics

A flameharrow approaches its prey while hooded and demands that one of those present perform a hideous, evil act. The nature of the demand varies, and it often involves a form of betrayal. For instance, upon encountering an adventuring party, it might demand that the group slay one of its own members, threatening to kill them all if they do not comply. If the victims comply, the flameharrow departs, content to leave them to wallow in their guilt. If they do not, it sweeps back its hood and attempts to destroy the lot of them.

Once in combat, the flameharrow makes every effort to fight from a distance. It makes claw attacks only if circumstances demand it, and retreats from melee at the first opportunity. If a fight turns against it, it flees; it has no interest in dying for its actions.

Flameharrow Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Religion check.

DC 15: A flameharrow is a rare undead creature, and it has a red jewel in one eye socket and a black jewel in the other. It possesses several fire- and fear-based powers.

DC 20: Flameharrow's enjoy forcing people to do evil. Only if a victim refuses its commands does it attack. The jewels in the skull lose their magic properties when removed or when the creature dies, but they are still valuable.

DC 25: Flameharrows are created by powers of vile chaos—some say Orcus—to spread pain and misery. The animating spirit of the creature is smelted from the soul of a homicidal madman.

Encounter Groups

Flameharrows are normally lone predators. On occasion, however, one might take command of, or covertly follow, a group of lesser undead, hoping that they'll weaken potential prey enough that the victims won't dare disobey the eye's demands.

Level 9 Encounter (XP 2,475)
- 1 flameharrow (level 12 elite controller)
- 2 guardian mummies (level 8 brute)
- 3 vampire spawn bloodhunters (level 10 minions)

Level 10 Encounter (XP 2,900)
- 1 flameharrow (level 12 elite controller)
- 2 flameskulls (level 8 artillery)
- 2 foulspawn berserkers (level 9 soldier)

Level 12 Encounter (XP 3,600)
- 3 battle wight (level 9 soldier)
- 1 flameharrow (level 12 elite controller)
- 2 skeletal tomb guardians (level 10 brute)

Level 13 Encounter (XP 4,300)
- 1 flameharrow (level 12 elite controller)
- 1 flesh golem (level 12 elite brute)
- 3 skeletal tomb guardians (level 10 brute)

About the Author

Ari Marmell has been writing RPGs and fiction for many years now, and has over a dozen credits for Wizards of the Coast. He most recently contributed to the upcoming *Draconomicon: Chromatic Dragons* supplement (due out later this year), as well as several *Dragon* articles and a 4th Edition update to "Last Breaths of Ashenport" for *Dungeon Magazine*.

Wolves of Maldeen

by Nicolas Logue

illustrations by Brian Hagan and Cyril Van Der Haegen

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BARON CARDOZA sipped an exquisite mulled wine from his silver goblet, then swallowed noisily. "Perfectly spiced, if I do say so myself." He pulled his bloodshot gaze from his cup to the half-naked wretch bleeding on the flagstone floor of his receiving chamber. "What's he done again?"

"Thievery, m'lord," Justiciar Drent said. He aimed a casual kick at the shivering boy. The boy mewled in agony and vomited, eliciting a sour grimace from Cardoza.

"Deal with him," the baron said as he waved a hand in dismissal and turned his attention back to the goblet.

A breeze sent a shiver through his bulky form and caused him to look around the room. The baron's bleary eyes focused on the far doors, which he saw being braced wide open by a man in gray. As more of the landscape behind the stranger came into view, sunlight reflected off the snowy landscape and blinded the baron.

As the baron threw up a hand to cover his eyes, the stranger said, "M'lord, you'll excuse this intrusion, I hope. I've come to collect this poor soul and see to him properly."

"Who are you?" Cardoza asked, his voice's pitch higher than normal. "Get out of my manor. Now!" His screech had accompaniment—the grating scrape of Justiciar Drent's longsword tearing free from its scabbard.

"You heard his lordship. Be gone, or I'll bleed you like—"

"Like you bled this boy, your honor?" The gray stranger's voice became as cold as the wind blowing into the room. The man's own blade came free of its sheath. "That boy is a criminal. He stole a loaf of fresh-baked bread. But tell me, sirs, is that a greater crime than allowing a boy to go hungry in the dead of winter while you sip wine from a goblet whose jewels alone could feed fifty families for a month?"

"I'll kill you, slave." Drent strove for a fierce tone, but failed.

"You might. But death is far preferable to living alongside men like you." And with that the gray man stalked toward Drent like a wolf, and the cold wind carried certain death along with him.

History of the Wolf

As a beardless officer, Maldeen volunteered to join the Gray Wolves, a ragtag militia assembled overnight near the end of an orc invasion and ordered to Red Rock Pass to stem the tide of these orcs. Hundreds of battles, some of the bloodiest seen in this age, took place in Red Rock Pass, and the battle of the Gray Wolves put them all to shame. It was pure slaughter. Within 2 hours, three hundred Gray Wolves had died on the valley floor, and among the dead were all eight of Maldeen's superior officers. The young lieutenant took command of the tattered remnants of the Gray Wolves. He was fourteen at the time. The tales of how Maldeen broke the orc horde like a wave against the rocks vary tremendously. In some, he shows a dramatic aptitude for tactics and outwits the orc chieftains. In others, he single-handedly cuts a path through the orc hordes and leads his Gray Wolves to victory. However he did it, the cold fact of the matter remains: A boy cast the savage tribes back to Black Shard Peaks.

On his return from the front, the baron of Maldeen's lands heralded the young warrior as a hero. When this boy was raised high on a dais next to the baron to address the people, he did not regale them with tales of bravery and battle. Instead he launched into a scathing indictment of the baron's decision to hurl the militia into the jaws of death, while surrounding his keep with a thousand pikes and archers to await the enemy after they had chewed through the Gray Wolves. Maldeen assailed the baron with the names of every single carpenter, brewer, farmer, and artisan of the Gray Wolves butchered by orc axe and spear. The baron had Maldeen arrested, and the boy wallowed in the dungeons while a strike force of Gray Wolf veterans laid siege to the keep. It took three years, but they broke the army's resolve, and, in the end, the baron's own general impaled him on a golden sword he later laid at Maldeen's feet.

The fighting forces of the area demanded that Maldeen assume leadership of the barony, but he refused, instead restoring the baron's son and acting as his closest advisor to ensure the boy grew up virtuous and far stronger than his cowardly father. For forty more years Maldeen commanded the baron's armies against countless foes, and then he retired from service and disappeared.

Maldeen's story might have ended there were it not for the massacre at Delkarem's Vale. A group of refugees fled the Vale when a band of ogres descended on their town and slaughtered everything in sight. Those who escaped ran headlong into Starfall Forest and scampered through the thick woods for days, ending up starving and nearly exhausted to death at the front door of simple log cabin in the deep solitude of the forest.

A leathery old man, crippled from a life of bone-crushing battle, answered the door. The refugees' only hope against a ravening tribe of pursuing ogres was an eighty-four-year-old veteran with one crushed leg. Maldeen had seen worse. He died that day, his aged chest crushed by an ogre's club, but not before he culled more than half their number and scattered the ogres into the forest. The refugees he saved spread tales of the old man's heroism far and wide, and when it came to light he was the same Maldeen who led the Gray Wolves to victory at Red Rock Pass over seventy years before, memorials sprouted up across the land, and wayside shrines honoring Maldeen as a true guardian of the common folk and scourge of corruption and evil became common sights along the road. These shrines soon attracted drifters—young men and women whose communities had been torn asunder by strife. They'd seen their families trampled by evil and witnessed atrocities and injustices heaped upon those unable to defend themselves. These refugees, vagabonds, and wanderers were inspired by Maldeen's courage and virtue, so they took up arms in his name and swore never to allow rampage and iniquity to visit the meek again. They called themselves the Gray Wolves, and their pack has now grown hundreds strong.

The tales of how Maldeen broke the orc horde vary tremendously. However he did it, the cold fact remains: A boy cast the savage tribes back to Black Shard Peaks.

Ways of the Wolf

Those who seek to emulate Maldeen must have the discipline to walk his path, which might lead them into conflict with others. However, since conflict is a part of life, a follower of Maldeen readily deals with it—whether through force of arms or force of words.

Wandering Warriors

"Ours is the wanderer's path. No hearth to warm our feet by, no love to warm our hearts against the cold of night. . . ."

Home is where evil works its fell power. Life as one of the Gray Wolves is spent on a lonely path that leads to the grimmest stretches of blood-soiled earth they can find—where a sword and a strong heart is desperately needed. A Gray Wolf has no ties. Most who come to Maldeen's order are orphans who have witnessed the terrors of evil and the slaughter of chaos. These wayward souls find a new family among the Gray Wolves. Sometimes, though, those seeking to become one of the Gray Wolves sever their ties to join the order. No family can come first; no love can sap the resolve of a Gray Wolf. To become one of Maldeen's pack, a candidate must leave his or her old life behind, which might mean faking a death or ignoring family obligations that might hinder his or her tireless fight against evil.

The Gray Mantle

"We do not presume to purity, only to the total opposition of evil. Wear no ostentatious robes of white, my wolves, but don the gray instead. Do not seek shining glory, but rather an ignominious struggle, whose only reward is the battle."

Wolves of Maldeen wear gray. They blend into the shadows, where they can best hunt their prey. They scorn adornments and finery, and instead they wear simple breeches and tunics, warm fur cloaks, and well-worn boots. Gray Wolves do not seek to stand out, but rather they become one with the pack. Their cause sets them apart from common folk, and any incidental wealth gained helps the fight against evil. Thus the Gray Wolves seek nothing finer.

Bow to No One

"The wolf is no dog to beg at a king's table for scraps. We are hunters, not slaves. We serve no throne, and we lend our swords to no single nation or emperor's cause. We fight evil, and in doing so we remain detached from petty politics. No baron's banner for us. No lord's service. Never bow to another person. The pack is all we need."

Gray Wolves scorn the mundane ways of the world and the petty machinations of politic bodies. They never swear any oaths of fealty. Loyalty is given to the pack, and the single most important oath the Gray Wolves swear is to fight evil wherever they find it. Kings and queens might waste their lives in hopes of redrawing a border on a map, but the Gray Wolves are never pawns in the petty games of power that monarchs and royalty play.

Code of the Gray Wolves

There are fates worse than death. The worst is living powerless in a world filled with evil. If evil is the only way to survive, embrace death as a lover, and leave the world a better place.

Your life for an innocent's always. Fearing death is a luxury we cannot afford.

Seed the earth with blood, and you shall reap more of the same. Kill only what must be killed, and seek no petty excuse to loose steel and spill blood. Drawing a sword is a grave matter not to be taken lightly—and never to be enjoyed.

Vengeance never—justice always. Vengeance is a weak person's balm for the wounds of our time. Justice is a forge that burns impurities from our world.

Carry not just the fangs of the wolf, but a heart filled with empathy—we must never become what we hunt.

The Seven Stratagems of Maldeen

Maldeen's legendary exploits as a commander have yielded dozens of lessons to warlords and captains the world over, and a text penned by a scholar who followed Maldeen's career-at-arms closely detailed his seven greatest revelations as pertains to warfare. Many of these stratagems were lost when the original manuscript was burned by a blast of dragon's breath that also claimed the scholar's life, and three have been pieced together from secondhand accounts. The other four remain shrouded in mystery, though most Gray Wolves have their own interpretations of them ranging from well-researched possibilities to sheer fabrication.

The Manticore and the Wyvern

Legend speaks of a time Maldeen was pinned down by an immense manticore. His arrows exhausted and his leg pierced with a tail spike, Maldeen saw his end was nigh. The manticore circled above, raining down spikes, but lo, Maldeen spied another shape in the sky: a black silhouette on the clouds. As a wyvern drew nigh, it caught a glimpse of Maldeen, and the manticore had just circled out of sight behind a ridge. Maldeen thought fast and stepped out from behind cover, waving his arms and taunting the wyvern with curses and hoots. The venomous wyvern took the bait and soared down to pick off the irritating little human. Maldeen timed it perfectly. Just as the wyvern closed, its deadly stinger poised for the kill, the manticore emerged from behind the ridge above and let fly its spikes. The wyvern's shadow cast its pall on Maldeen as the manticore's spines tore into its flank. The wyvern, enraged at the unprovoked attack, turned its wrath on the manticore. The two beasts clashed in midair, and their blood rained down in torrents. When the battle was done, both lay dead at Maldeen's feet.

The Stone in the Water

During his grim campaign against the jarls of the frozen north, Maldeen witnessed the Great Drowning in Ice Maw Bay. He watched as longships filled with his troops rowed for shore, just as great frost giants appeared on the cliffs above and pried free a crag of ice and stone of immense size. The gigantic boulder tumbled to the water below, and its impact turned the calm bay into a churning sea of murder. Longships rolled, one atop another, and Maldeen watched his legions pitch beneath the killing cold of the frigid waters. As he turned his flagship from the bay, he remarked: "So one stone in the water can destroy an army, and the ripples of one act can spell a thousand defeats." So Maldeen abandoned his campaign against the giants, which was the only rout in his glorious history of command. However, he took away a valuable if bitter lesson: Choose your battles carefully, and be aware that one blow can turn the tide against or for your forces.

Straw Soldiers and Hidden Spears

At one point, Maldeen's forces were surrounded at Broke Neck Keep. The ravening orc hordes bore down on the crumbling castle, its time-worn walls the only thing between them and his meager army. Because his forces had been whittled down to dozens by a hard-fought campaign, Maldeen ordered the armory of the old keep plundered. Within, his forces found only helms, ragged chainmail, and worm-eaten leather armor. Maldeen did not despair. He ordered the musty straw from the keep's old stables gathered up. By his command, they fashioned dummies of straw and chain, then topped the figures with helms and armed them with wooden spears (little more than sharpened stakes). They posted this straw army on the walls, and the hordes below the gates suddenly saw a hundred well-armed spear-wielding forces manning the walls where they believed only a handful of defenders remained. They fled to gather reinforcements, and Maldeen survived another impossible battle.

While the orcs ran for the hills to gather the rest of their tribes, a large battalion of troops loyal to Maldeen arrived at Broke Neck Keep. The officers rejoiced and made plans to engage the orcs in full force upon their return. But Maldeen belayed their orders. Instead they tore down the straw dummies and placed only a handful of the Gray Wolves on the wall. The fresh reinforcements hid behind the walls, their deadly spears at the ready. When the orcs returned, the forces on the wall called down in surrender, claiming plague had spread among them during the orcs' absence. The monsters rejoiced at the easy victory and marched through the keep's open gates—straight into a bloody ambush. Afterward, when troops congratulated Maldeen on his brilliant strategy, he stated: "Show the enemy the opposite of the truth. If you are few, show them many; if you are many, show them few. Do this, and victory remains within reach every time."

Dens of the Wolf

No Gray Wolf has a home, but the Gray Wolves as an order use various locations throughout the lands to help them in their toil against the forces of darkness.

The Gray Lodge

Though the Gray Wolves have no place to call their home, the Gray Lodge serves as a temporary headquarters. This nexus of the organization is located far from the bustle and drone of the city, where the comings and goings of the Gray Wolves attract little attention. The Gray Wolves also move it to a new location if local agencies learn of its location and seek its destruction, or if the Gray Wolves feel that its placement is no longer advantageous. The Gray Lodge's exterior is wholly unremarkable in every case—it is nothing more than another farmhouse amid surrounding farmlands or a log cabin in the middle of forested land. Here the Gray Wolves trade information and supplies; seek aid, healing, and respite; and record

the tales of their adventures in the Annals of Maldeen.

The heart of the Gray Lodge is the shrine to Maldeen, which is a simple pedestal that holds a leather-bound book of illustrations of every Gray Wolf who has given his or her life in the timeless, and often thankless, battle against evil. This is the only testament to their sacrifices and the only remembrance of their devotion to the cause. No families remain to honor the fallen Gray Wolves, and so this memorial is their only record. The book, created by a powerful wizard of the Gray Wolves named Zalrashir, is a marvel. Whenever a Gray Wolf perishes, no matter how far away, or in whatever lightless dungeon, his or her face appears in the book. The book's primary purpose as a salute to the fallen is obvious, and it also allows the Pack Masters to keep a grim tally of the loyal Gray Wolves who have perished and also helps indicate how many new recruits are needed to replenish the pack.

Wayside Shrines

Wherever the Gray Wolves roam, they erect small shrines to Maldeen both to remind themselves of his sacrifice and to inspire the local people of the area to oppose evil as their patron once did. Most of these are nothing more than a simple structure of thatched logs with a few wolf pelts and a small statue of Maldeen, or a gray sword planted in the earth as a tribute to his cause. Gray Wolves and their allies make small offerings to Maldeen here, sometimes leaving behind trophies from their efforts against evil monsters. These shrines serve another purpose as well. Gray Wolves passing through often bury supplies and weapons beneath the shrine's earthen floor, so that their fellows might find relief here in times of need. A handy quiver of arrows, a *healing potion*, or rations might await visiting Gray Wolves.

Safe Havens

The safe havens of the Gray Wolves can exist below farmhouses, in old abandoned barns overgrown with weeds and ringed by shady trees, in old smugglers' tunnels, or even in secret mountain caves. These hideaways offer members of the order a well-concealed place of respite when the forces of evil ride close at their heels.

More importantly, these hiding spots, whose locations are among the order's closest held secrets, allow the Gray Wolves to sequester innocents or refugees safely out of harms' way when a battle with evil shakes a region. The safe havens are used only once, and then abandoned, lest the Gray Wolves' enemies learn their location and lay an ambush for the order's operatives and their charges. Each haven is stocked with medicines, fresh blankets, clothing, and enough rations and fresh water to support a large group of people for as long as a week. When the Gray Wolves act against an evil power in the land, they first hide any innocents who might pay for their actions in these havens, and then they post a few of their number to safeguard the group while the rest of the Gray Wolves take the fight to their foes elsewhere.

Fang and Claw

The Gray Wolves employ many weapons in their endless fight against evil. Below are a few of the more potent magic items that members of the order have created over the years to aid the Gray Wolves in their noble quest.

Wolfen Weapon — Level 9+

This blade's edge is as jagged as a fanged maw, and its steel is dull and gray.

Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	**Lvl 24**	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	**Lvl 29**	+6	2,625,000 gp
Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp			

Weapon: Heavy blade, light blade
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus
Property: You gain a +2 bonus to Perception checks. You ignore the Perception penalty while sleeping.
Power (Daily): Free Action. You can use this power before any creature has acted during a surprise round and even if you are surprised. You and all allies within 5 squares of you are no longer surprised. You can act during the surprise round, if applicable. If no one is surprised, skip the surprise round and instead begin combat as normal.

Greaves of Maldeen — Level 12

Wolf fur rings this enchanted leg armor, which allows you to hunt down evil foes with ease.

Item Slot: Feet 13,000 gp
Property: Gain a +2 item bonus to speed as long as you move toward an enemy and that enemy is in your line of sight the whole time.
Power (Daily): Immediate Reaction. When an enemy moves away from you, you shift 3 squares toward that enemy.

Hood of the Wolf — Level 20

Fashioned from the head of a great gray wolf, this helm frames the wearer's face in the open maw of the beast, and it crowns them with its red eyes.

Item Slot: Head 125,000 gp
Property: Gain darkvision and a +4 item bonus to Insight, Perception, and Intimidate checks.
Power (Daily): Minor Action. Choose an enemy. Until the end of the encounter, that enemy does not benefit from concealment, total concealment, cover, superior cover, or invisibility against you.

New Heroic Tier Feat

The feat below is available to a character of any level who meets the prerequisite.

Against All Odds

Prerequisite: Wis 13

Benefit: If, at the start of your turn, three or more enemies are adjacent to you, you gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls until the end of your turn.

Leaders of the Pack

The pack grows and shrinks, ever fluctuating in size in its constant war of attrition with the forces of evil. However, a few of the Gray Wolves, renowned for their daring exploits against the vile monsters and corrupt powers of the world, have made a name for themselves over the years. The following are a few of the better-known members of the Gray Wolves.

Pack Master Varain Cawdorai

A beautiful raven-haired elf warlord, Varain is one of the founders of the Gray Wolves. She came to the pack after orc raiders beheaded everyone in her family (except for her sister) in a cruel axe-wielding competition. The two couldn't avoid hearing everything from the hiding place they'd crawled into before the orcs broke into their home. The escape they made after the orcs left was harrowing, but successful, and then Varain grimly wandered the lands with her sister in tow. She resorted to theft and even murder to survive the harsh life the deities handed down to her. Terrified of the idea of developing ties to another being lest a malevolent monster reap them as they did her family, Varain allowed herself to care only for her twin, Selessa.

Varain would have amounted to nothing but a sneak thief and sociopath, but one day her wanderings brought her to the home of a simple woodcutter in Delkarem's Vale. Maldeen had eluded the public eye at long last to live out his few remaining years in peaceful solitude with no more bloodshed to cloud his dreams with night terrors. Varain tried to murder the old man in his sleep so that she could take her time going through his belongings, but she was shocked when the decrepit human overpowered her. After subduing Varain, Maldeen took her and Selessa in, and over the years he helped Varain come to grips with the atrocity she faced as a girl. He channeled her hatred of the world into a cold focused rage against evil, and eventually he forged it into a furious devotion to opposing tyranny in all its myriad forms. Maldeen raised his first Gray Wolf, though at the time he didn't realize what Varain would start when she departed his cabin.

It was only a month after Varain and Selessa left Delkarem Vale to seek adventure that Maldeen died defending refugees from rampaging ogres. When news of his death spread, Varain swore to honor her master by founding an order of justiciars to carry on the fight against evil in his name.

Varain is past middle age for an elf, but would still be stunningly beautiful if not for her cold and detached air. She has spent her life hunting those who would kill others for gain or sport, in remembrance of both her family and of the man who gave her life back to her. She has never wavered from this cause, and the constant struggle has taken a toll on her ability to relax and relate to others in any other terms beyond battle companions.

Varain's life has been one of torment and struggle, and darkness haunts her at every turn. Troubles follow the elf, and she has watched everyone she cared about perish at evil's hands. To mount insult atop atrocity, in recent years her twin Selessa vanished while apprenticing at the Baleheart Academy, a mysterious training ground for students of the magical arts. The academy is nestled inside the magically preserved corpse of a gigantic monstrous spider the size of a small island. After hearing no word from her twin for months, Varain dispatched Gray Wolves to Baleheart to investigate, and none of her people have returned. Doomed to lose everyone she holds dear, Varain feared for the worst, and she immediately set out to investigate Baleheart personally. Over a month has passed since she set foot into the dark spidery citadel of Baleheart, and her fellow Gray Wolves have started to worry about her. Who else might face the terrors within the Academy's grounds and confront the shadowy overseers of Baleheart, who now hold Varain and her sister captive? Also, Varain's absence has led the Gray Wolves into an internal struggle over who should lead in her place.

Pack Master Jandor Smoketooth

As a towering tiefling warlord with fearsome red skin, pitch black eyes, and curling ram's horns, Jandor cuts a sinister figure. His dedication to the Gray Wolves is a mystery to some of the order's less enlightened members who view the warlord warily. The truth is that Jandor's devotion to the pack is second to none. Many come to the cause of Maldeen with nothing left to lose, but Jandor left behind a princehood among his people, and he set aside his entire family when he lent his blade to the Gray Wolves thirteen years ago. Disgusted with the corruption festering among his royal kinfolk, and particularly repulsed by their plans to ally with a nameless demon lord shackled beneath the ancient ruins of Vor Kragal, Jandor forsook his birthright. An outcast among his kin, the tiefling devoted himself to the fight against evil with tenacity unrivaled by his fellow Gray Wolves and soon rose high in the order. Recently granted the title of Pack Master, much to the displeasure of others among the order, Jandor is now placed to take Varain's post as the Gray Wolves' leader. Contentious souls among the pack would prefer otherwise, despite the fact that Varain named Jandor as her successor shortly before she ventured forth to Baleheart Academy.

Pack Master Waldrun Gypsumbane

A stout dwarf with a cheery glow to his cheeks, python-thick arms, and a bushy red beard, Waldrun is well liked among the Gray Wolves and is the favored successor to Varain among the pack. Waldrun's easy way with people and his past exploits as a champion against the abominations of the Underdark have earned him acclaim. Truthfully though, Waldrun has not hefted his hammer against evil in many years, and he spends most of his time drinking. The dwarf's boisterous love of ale has grown from a pastime to an addiction and crutch, which has prevented him from mounting any noteworthy campaigns against evildoers recently. The dwarf has grown tired, and his last harrowing raid into the Underdark left his soul shaken—he cannot muster the courage to face another excursion. He drowns his shame in ale now, and he hides his cowardice and insecurities behind a quick smile. Some of the older veterans among the Gray Wolves see the pain in the old dwarf's eyes, and they fear both for his soul and for the order if Waldrun ascends to Varain's post as leader of the pack over the less favored, but far better suited, Jandor. Dangerous times await the Gray Wolves unless Varain is rescued from Baleheart Academy before the need to choose her successor becomes imminent.

Paragon Path

Pack Master

Prerequisite: Warlord class, good alignment

The Wolves are ferocious and dedicated to the last, but a few among them, whether through experience, a talent for command, or simply survival in the face of impossible odds, grow into undisputed masters of the Pack. These leaders, who look to Maldeen's shining example and aspire to pure excellence in command, are always warlords who combine their mastery of tactics with a hatred of all things evil to great effect. The Pack Masters of Maldeen are shining beacons of virtue, inspiring their allies in the fight through the darkest hours of the Pack's struggle. Bane to corruption, evil, and temptation, the Pack Masters are elite among the Wolves. Their tireless devotion to the struggle of light against darkness serves as a lesson to aspirant candidates for membership in the Wolves, and as a fearsome warning against any who might choose a darker path in search of power.

Pack Master Path Features

Maldeen's Hunt (11th level): You gain a +5 bonus to Perception checks to track creatures, and you and your allies can cover 5 miles an hour overland. When you end your movement 2 squares from an enemy, you can shift 1 square as a free action.

Pack Master's Action (11th level): You can spend an action point to give an ally a standard action instead of taking one yourself. The ally takes the standard action as part of your turn.

Beacon for the Pack (16th level): When an ally takes an action granted by an action point, that ally can also move 3 squares or shift 1 square.

Manticore-and-Wyvern — **Pack Master Attack 11**

You lure two enemies into each other's blows, giving an ally a chance to take a shot.

Encounter ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action — **Melee** weapon
Target: 1 creature
Attack: Strength vs. Will
Hit: Slide the target 2 squares. Choose one creature now adjacent to the target. The target makes a melee basic attack against that creature, and that creature makes a melee basic attack against the target. An ally within 5 squares of you can make a basic attack against the target.

Casting Ripples — **Pack Master Utility 12**

You extricate your allies from their predicaments, giving them the opportunity to reengage—or to flee.

Daily ✦ Martial
Minor Action — **Close** burst 5
Effect: Push willing allies in the burst a number of squares up to 3 + your Charisma modifier.

Straw Soldiers — **Pack Master Attack 20**

You strike a true blow and drive your allies to keep their true locations from the enemy.

Daily ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action — **Melee** weapon
Target: 1 creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 3[W] + Strength modifier damage.
Effect: You and your allies gain concealment against all attacks until the end of your next turn.
Sustain Minor: When you sustain this power, the concealment effect persists.

About the Author

Nicolas Logue is a composite of several different real-life madmen and degenerates. A collection of works are attributed to "Nicolas Logue" such as *Voyage of the Golden Dragon, Eyes of the Lich Queen,* and Pathfinder #3: Hook Mountain Massacre. Another "Logue" has recently been hired by Paizo Publishng as their Organized Play Coordinator. Yet another is a stage actor and fight choreographer in NYC.

Creature Incarnations: Kobolds

By Mike Mearls

illustrations by Jim Nelson

Kobolds are mean, tricky little runts who love to use traps to take down adventurers. This article presents eight new kobolds to set against your characters, along with a few hints, tricks, and tips for making the most of the kobolds in your adventures.

Shifty Little Buggers!

The kobold's shifty ability might not seem too useful at first, but after running a few games you should start to notice its utility. Shifting twice in one round is a powerful tool, especially in close quarters. In addition, keep in mind that shifting as a minor action is essentially a +1 bonus to speed. A kobold can move up to its full speed and then shift into an attack position.

Kobolds should almost always use one or two shifts to move into a flanking position. They remain in place only if they absolutely must stand their ground, such as to protect a spellcaster from harm.

Wizards and paladins hate fighting kobolds. A kobold under the effects of *paladin's challenge* can attack the paladin, shift, and then move away, forcing the paladin to chase the kobold or allow his *challenge* to end.

Wizards have a hard time targeting kobolds with area spells, as they can shift around fighters and slip into the party's midst. Kobold minions, in particular, should use shifty to move apart, only bunching up when they can insure that any area attack also includes a character.

Traps and Terrain

Kobolds build their lairs to help repel attackers. They love small, cramped spaces that force their enemies to split up or stumble directly into the traps they set. Here are ten common kobold tactics:

1. Narrow Passages, Wide Rooms: Kobolds like 5-foot-wide corridors because they force intruders to bunch up and make it hard to avoid traps. On the other hand, wide rooms allow the more numerous kobolds to surround characters.

2. Aim High: Kobolds prefer to build traps that they can ignore, such as scything blades that whistle harmless over a Small creature's head, but impale Medium or larger foes. Kobolds don't build all their traps this way, as they are useless against gnomes and halflings, but they prefer them in cramped areas or places where the kobolds expect to stand and fight.

3. Secret Doors: Kobolds love secret doors, especially ones in odd places. They don't mind crawling through hidden passages, and they like building entrances and exits in the ceiling or at the base or top of a wall.

4. Small Doors: A door sized for a Small creature slows down bigger foes, as do gates with bars far enough apart for Small creatures to move through, but too narrow for bigger ones. Treat these doors as

difficult terrain for Medium or bigger foes, and the gates require actions (to bend bars or open doors) or force Medium creatures to squeeze through them. The best part about such areas is that kobolds can use shifty to slip through them, while enemies waste their precious actions.

5. Delayed Traps: Many kobold trapsmiths build snares with a safety switch. Until the switch is pulled, the trap remains deactivated. Kobolds like to use spy holes to watch a party move through a room, then activate the traps behind them. When the characters move through the "safe" area, the traps activate.

6. Arrow Slits: Kobolds like nothing more than a one-sided fight. They sow their lairs with holes through which they can fire arrows or crossbow bolts from the safety of the opposite side of a wall.

7. Escape Routes: Kobolds live by the maxim that an embarrassing retreat is better than a noble death. They riddle their lairs with secret passages for quick escapes, and it is the rare kobold chief who doesn't have a well-rehearsed escape plan handy.

8. Secrecy is a Shield: In dungeon environments where kobolds must compete with bigger monsters, they prefer to keep the exact location of their lair secret. Kobolds prefer to protect important rooms in their complexes with secret doors, trapdoors, and other hidden passages. When faced with a tough foe, they hide rather than fight.

9. Ambush: Kobolds attack with surprise whenever possible. They like to leave distractions that lure the unwary into traps and ambushes, like small piles of coins, shiny rocks and gems, or weird statues and other features.

10. Guerrilla Tactics: Fight, run, and fight some more are the basic principles of kobold tactics. Shifty allows them to attack, shift, and run, a combination kobolds love to use to lure enemies into traps and ambushes. Kobolds hate decisive, drag-out brawls. Instead, they nip away at the foe and fight to the death only when cornered.

THE KOBOLD VICTORY CHART

Kobolds are prone to victorious outbursts when they finally defeat a foe. When a kobold drops a character to zero or fewer hit points, roll on the following table if you want to inject some random craziness into your game:

1-10. No effect.
The kobold lacks the imagination to do anything interesting. It might chitter or giggle, but it really doesn't know what to do when it defeats something.

11. Kill things, take their stuff!
The kobold picks an item off the fallen adventurer as its trophy. It spends a minor action next round dancing in celebration before running off to hide its treasure.

12. Ask not what you can do for the tribe!
The kobold spends a round standing on the fallen adventurer's body, delivering a victory speech. All kobolds within 5 squares heal 5 hit points.

13. I attribute my success solely to luck!
The kobold immediately hides in its victim's backpack or under his unconscious/dead form.

14. Whoa! That's never happened before!
The kobold is stunned until the end of its next turn, shocked by its own success.

15. Come get some!
The kobold spends a round taunting the nearest PC.

16. Victory!
The kobold lets out an inspiring whoop that grants all kobolds within 5 squares +1 on attacks for the rest of the fight.

17. You're next!
The kobold gains an action point.

18. This will only anger them!
The kobold drops its weapon and runs away in fear of retribution. It comes back to the fight in 1d4 rounds.

19. I'm only getting started!
The kobold heals hit points back up to his bloodied number if bloodied, or up to full if he is not yet bloodied.

20. FEAR ME!
The kobold gains +2 on attacks and damage and +1 on defenses until the end of the encounter.

Kobold Chieftain	**Level 5 Soldier (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid	XP 200
Initiative +5	**Senses** Perception +8; darkvision
HP 65; **Bloodied** 32	
AC 21; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 17; see also *trap sense*	
Speed 5	
Battle Axe (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+12 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 and the target is marked until the end of the chieftain's next turn.	
Fight On, You Slugs! (minor; recharge ⚅)	
Close burst 2; each kobold ally in this area gains a +4 bonus on its next attack.	
Knee Splitter (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**	
+12 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). *Aftereffect:* Target is slowed (save ends).	
Cheap Shot (minor; recharge ⚅)	
+10 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 damage, and the target is stunned (save ends).	
Shifty (minor; at-will)	
A kobold can shift 1 square as a minor action.	
Trap Sense	
A kobold gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against traps.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Diplomacy +10, Intimidate +10, Perception +8	
Str 18 (+6)	**Dex** 13 (+3)	**Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 17 (+5)	**Int** 12 (+3)	**Cha** 17 (+5)
Equipment plate armor, battleaxe, sling	

Kobold Chieftain

Occasionally, a kobold is born who grows to an astounding height for his folk. These specimens invariably become chieftains, combining a kobold's low cunning with the strength and toughness of a dwarf. In combat, a chieftain fights dirty. He makes low blows and does whatever it takes to win. Chieftains lead from the front, but they are never shy about using *shifty* combined with a double move to escape a difficult situation.

Kobold Wild Mage **Level 5 Controller**
Small natural humanoid XP 200

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +4; darkvision
HP 62; **Bloodied** 31
AC 17; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 18; see also *trap sense*
Speed 6

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs. AC; 1d4 + 2 damage.

Wild Surge (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement**
Ranged 10; +9 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 damage and slide 2.

Wild Magic (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement and Fire, Cold, Lightning, or Poison**
Ranged 10; +9 vs. Reflex; on a hit roll 1d4 to determine the effect:
1—Flame Bolt, 1d8 + 4 fire damage and ongoing 5 fire (save ends).
2—Frost Bolt, 1d6 + 4 cold damage and immobilized (save ends).
3—Lightning Arc, 1d8 + 4 lightning damage and dazed (save ends).
4—Venom Bolt, 1d6 + 4 poison damage, ongoing 5 poison and slowed (save ends both).

Wild Teleport (immediate when damaged; encounter) ✦ **Teleport**
The kobold wild mage teleports 1d6 squares.

Wild Blast (when reduced to 0 hit points)
When a kobold wild mage is slain, it explodes: close burst 2; +10 vs. Reflex, 2d6 + 4 fire, cold, and lightning damage.

Shifty (minor; at-will)
A kobold can shift 1 square as a minor action.

Trap Sense
A kobold gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against traps.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Draconic
Skills Arcana +10, Stealth +11
Str 11 (+2) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 15 (+4)
Con 14 (+4) **Int** 16 (+5) **Cha** 16 (+5)
Equipment dagger, robes

Kobold Wild Mage Tactics

Kobold wild mages practice a dangerous, rudimentary form of arcane magic taught to them in ages past by their dragon masters. The kobolds received incomplete training, and their dangerous, arcane techniques still survive to this day. While kobolds can and do train as wizards, warlocks, and other casters, some kobolds see the use of wild magic as a badge of honor. The risks they take, and the power they wield, draw the respect of the tribe.

In combat, kobold wild mages use a simple strategy. They stand behind their allies and blast away with their *wild magic* attack, pouring energy into their enemies in an effort to overwhelm them with raw power. Wild mages pay particular attention to enemy wizards and other casters.

In battle, wild mages surge with arcane power. It rumbles just beneath their skin, and sometimes manifests as belches of fire from their mouths, miniature lighting strokes from their eyes, or a patina of frost beneath their feat. They are jumpy, easily startled, and prone to stuttering, mild seizures, and random muscle spasms.

Kobold Piker **Level 2 Brute**
Small natural humanoid XP 125

Initiative +2 **Senses** Perception +7; darkvision
HP 42; **Bloodied** 21
AC 15; **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 14; see also *trap sense*
Speed 6

Kobold Pike (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+5 vs. AC; 1d10 + 3 damage.

Piker Tactics
If a piker readies an action to make a basic melee attack against a foe that enters a square adjacent to it, it gains +4 damage on that attack.

Warding Strike (standard; recharge ⚁ ⚂) ✦ **Weapon**
+5 vs. Fortitude, with a +1 bonus per ally adjacent to the target; 1d10 + 3 damage and push 1 square.

Shifty (minor; at-will)
A kobold can shift 1 square as a minor action.

Trap Sense
A kobold gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against traps.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Draconic
Skills Athletics +8, Perception +7, Stealth +9
Str 15 (+3) **Dex** 13 (+2) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 12 (+2) **Int** 7 (-1) **Cha** 10 (+1)
Equipment hide armor, kobold pike

Kobold Spiker **Level 3 Controller**
Small natural humanoid XP 150

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +3; darkvision
HP 44; **Bloodied** 22
AC 17; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14; see also *trap sense*
Speed 6

Short Sword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.

Sling (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 10/20; +7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.

Caltrops (minor; encounter) ✦ **Trap**
As a minor action, a kobold spiker can drop caltrops in an adjacent square. Any size Medium or larger creature that enters a square with caltrops suffers a +10 attack against Reflex that does 2d4 + 4 damage and slows the target (save ends). Once the caltrops hit with an attack, they are crushed and destroyed. A spiker carries enough caltrops to fill 1 square.

Knee Shot (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 10/20; +7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage and push 1 square. If a creature is attacked by a trap due to this forced movement, the trap gains combat advantage against the target.

Shifty (minor; at-will)
A kobold can shift 1 square as a minor action.

Trap Sense
A kobold gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against traps.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Draconic
Skills Dungeoneering +8, Stealth +11, Thievery +11
Str 11 (+1) **Dex** 16 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 12 (+2) **Int** 11 (+1) **Cha** 11 (+1)
Equipment leather armor, sling, short sword, foot spikes

Kobold Piker Tactics

Pikers are the biggest and dumbest kobolds, the ones willing to man the front line against an invading force. While pikers are dull for their kind, they still possess the low cunning typical of all kobolds.

Pikers form a rough line to block their opponents' advance. They prefer to ready an attack to skewer a foe who draws near, using their strength and the foe's momentum to stab him with a deadly attack. Once a piker is engaged by a foe, it uses shifty to move back 2 squares and then readies an action to make a basic

attack against a foe that draws near. While the kobolds slowly yield ground to their advancing enemies, their kobold tactics ability allows them to slowly and steadily wear down the enemies' strength.

A piker saves its *warding strike* ability as a last resort measure. As the pikers fall back, they eventually must stand their ground. *Warding strike* allows them to push their foes away, either creating a gap in the enemy formation that they can shift through or buying a moment to run away.

Pikers make deadly use of traps by attacking and falling back, luring enemies ahead to step on pressure plates, trip wires, and other triggers. *Warding strike* also lets them slam a foe into a trap.

Kobold Spiker Tactics

Kobold spikers are expert trapsmiths and tinkerers. They help construct the snares, deadfalls, and other traps that ring a kobold lair, and in combat they use foot spikes—small, improvised traps, to force their enemies into their traps or block a foe's advance.

Spikers are so named for the foot spikes they carry, wood and stone caltrops that shatter when a creature steps on them. Spikers scatter these on the floor before an advancing enemy before dodging back behind a line of waiting pikers. The foot spikes force an enemy to make a difficult choice, either risk a hobbling attack from the spikes or gamble on whether the open path through the spikes is riddled with traps.

After spikers drop their foot spikes, they use carefully aimed shots from their slings to knock foes backward into their traps. Through careful timing, good aim, and a near intuitive sense of how traps work, a spiker leaves his opponent vulnerable to a trap's subsequent attack.

Kobold Vermin Handler Tactics

A kobold vermin handler tends to the tribes insect pets and herd animals. Some kobold tribes raise beetles, spiders, and scorpions as food. The vermin handlers provide these vermin with food, take care of their nests, and harvest them to feed the tribe.

The vermin handlers spend almost all their time with their charges. While other creatures would face a multitude of poisonous bites from these creatures, vermin handlers can handle them with ease.

When the tribe faces a threat, the vermin handlers gather the most poisonous of their charges, load them into rickety, wooden cages, and rush to the front lines of the battle. In combat, the vermin handlers hurl these cages at their enemies. The cage splinters on impact, covering the target in a small swarm of angry, biting insects.

After throwing their cages, the handlers fall back to fire their slings. They have excellent aim as they practice by shooting fleeing insects out of the air, allowing them to land deadly shots.

Kobold Vermin Handler		**Level 3 Artillery**
Small natural humanoid		XP 150
Initiative +4	**Senses** Perception +2; darkvision	
HP 38; **Bloodied** 19		
AC 16; **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13; see also *trap sense*		
Speed 6		
⚔ **Hand Axe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
+7 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage.		
⊛ **Sling** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
Range 10/20; +10 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage.		
⊛ **Vermin Cage** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**		
Range 5; +8 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 2 damage, and ongoing 5 poison and dazed (save ends both). *Miss:* Attack deals half damage, and ongoing 2 poison and slow (save ends both).		
Shifty (minor; at-will)		
A kobold can shift 1 square as a minor action.		
Trap Sense		
A kobold gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against traps.		
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Draconic	
Skills Acrobatics +9, Stealth +11, Thievery +11		
Str 11 (+1)	**Dex** 17 (+4)	**Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 10 (+1)	**Cha** 10 (+1)
Equipment leather armor, hand axe, sling, vermin cage		

Kobold Rat Master — **Level 4 Elite Soldier**
Small natural humanoid — XP 350

Initiative +6 — **Senses** Perception +3; darkvision
Rat Horde aura 1; enemies that begin their turns in this aura suffer 5 damage. Enemies treat squares in the aura as difficult terrain. See *devouring horde*.
HP 114; **Bloodied** 57
AC 21; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 17; see also *trap sense*
Speed 6
Whip (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +11 vs. AC; 1d4 + 2 damage and pull 1 square.
Gnawing Rats (standard; at-will)
Close burst 2; +9 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 2 damage and ongoing 5 damage (save ends). See *devouring horde*.
Devouring Horde (standard; encounter)
Ranged 5; +9 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 3 damage and stunned (save ends); until the target saves, the rat master loses its *rat horde* aura and *gnawing rats* attacks.
Rat Frenzy (standard; encounter)
Close burst 1; +9 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 3 damage.
Shifty (minor; at-will)
A kobold can shift 1 square as a minor action.
Trap Sense
A kobold gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against traps.
Alignment Evil — **Languages** Draconic
Skills Nature +8
Str 14 (+4) — **Dex** 15 (+4) — **Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 17 (+5) — **Int** 12 (+3) — **Cha** 13 (+3)
Equipment hide armor, whip

Kobold Rat Master Tactics

The rat master is one of the most respected and powerful kobolds within a clan. Many tribes keep dire rats as a combination of war beasts, pack animals, and food source. The strongest rats fight alongside the clan, while the weakest and sickliest are destined for the butcher's chopping block.

Rat masters are continually surround by a swarm of small, ferocious rats. These vermin crawl over the rat master and attack the master's enemies. They are a sea of gnawing teeth around the master, devouring his enemies at his command.

Rat masters rely on the damage inflicted by their auras to bring down their enemies. In particular, they use shifty to slip between their enemies. Once a rat master engages the enemy, it shifts twice per turn using two minor actions.

Kobold Horde Tactics

A kobold horde is a tightly packed mob of kobolds whipped into a frenzy and unleashed against the enemy. Sometimes, the common laborers within a tribe mob together in a desperate, panicked attempt to overwhelm the enemy. Other times, a hobgoblin warlord gathers kobold prisoners together, starves them half to death, and then unleashes the desperate mob on the enemy.

Kobold hordes fight with simple tactics. They use the weight of their numbers to pull an enemy to the ground and rend him to death with their knives and claws. Their shifty ability makes them particularly deadly, as they can slip through defensive lines to surround and slay individual warriors.

Kobold Horde — **Level 6 Skirmisher**
Small natural humanoid (swarm) — XP 250

Initiative +6 — **Senses** Perception +2; darkvision
HP 67; **Bloodied** 33
AC 19; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 16; see also *trap sense*
Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 10 against close and area attacks.
Speed 6
Horde of Knives (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.
Overwhelm Surge (standard; recharge ⚁ ⚀) ✦ **Weapon**
Close burst 1; +9 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 5 damage and knocked prone.
Swarm the Fallen (minor; recharge ⚁ ⚀) ✦ **Weapon**
Prone enemies only; +13 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage.
Shifty (minor; at-will)
A kobold can shift 1 square as a minor action.
Trap Sense
A kobold gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against traps.
Alignment Evil — **Languages** Draconic
Skills Stealth +9
Str 13 (+4) — **Dex** 13 (+4) — **Wis** 9 (+2)
Con 11 (+3) — **Int** 7 (+1) — **Cha** 8 (+2)
Equipment daggers

Kobold War Priest — **Level 5 Controller**
Small natural humanoid — XP 200

Initiative +3 — **Senses** Perception +5; darkvision
HP 65; **Bloodied** 32
AC 19; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 19; see also *trap sense*
Speed 5
Mace (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+10 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage.
Venomous Sting (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement, Poison**
Range 5; +9 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 2 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).
Surge of Terror (standard; recharge ⚁ ⚀) ✦ Fear, **Implement**
Close burst 2; +9 vs. Will; 1d6 + 2 psychic damage, push 3, and dazed (save ends).
Devouring Stone (standard; encounter) ✦ **Implement**
Ranged 10; +9 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 3 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). Each time the target fails its save against this effect, it takes 1d6 damage.
Shifty (minor; at-will)
A kobold can shift 1 square as a minor action.
Trap Sense
A kobold gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against traps.
Alignment Evil — **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Intimidate +10, Religion +10
Str 14 (+5) — **Dex** 13 (+3) — **Wis** 17 (+5)
Con 17 (+6) — **Int** 14 (+4) — **Cha** 16 (+5)
Equipment scale armor, mace, holy symbol

Kobold War Priest

War priests lead the faithful into battle. They advise kobold chieftains, sometimes even rising to that position themselves. In battle, they lurk just behind the ranks of kobold warriors, using their *surge of terror* and *devouring stone* spells to isolate the enemy and allow the tribe to surround and slay adventurers one by one.

About the Author

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Alchemical Imbalance

BY BRUCE CORDELL AND CHRIS SIMS

illustrations by Wayne England

Goblins are wicked and grasping, and despite their stature, they lack some of the cowardice that other small humanoids display. Worse still, they're cunning and inventive, as well as perversely resourceful. They know and use dark sorcery and cruel equipment. The expansion of civilization has driven them to the borderlands, but goblins covet the territories occupied by friendlier folk, and they crave the wealth and decadence offered by wrongful conquest and theft.

What if the nasty ingenuity natural to goblins allowed an unusual leader to rise among them? How would his knack for alchemy and black magic shape his plans? How would he use his powers to direct his avaricious people, and how would he help them gain an advantage over benevolent folk? What would need to be done to stop him? Who would take on that task?

This article is aimed at helping you construct an adventure for 3rd- to 4th-level PCs.

Bile Spider Tribe

The Bile Spider goblins were once little different than any other. They huddled in caves and mounted minor raids to supplement their supplies. Without attracting enough notice to be worthy of smiting, they led their nasty lives on the far-flung outskirts of anything that could be called civilization. They honored the war god Bane by subjugating lesser tribes, taming monsters, harassing travelers, and practicing black arts.

Among these arts is a long tradition of alchemical practice among the tribe's magicians. In the past, the Bile Spiders used these techniques to give themselves edges in battle, poison foes, and create instant gouts of flame without magic. But the practice of alchemy has evolved to a new height among these goblins.

A talented hexer named Ziguarz has risen to prominence among the Bile Spiders. After spending years toiling deep in the carved caves that serve the tribe as a lair, Ziguarz managed to come up with foul alchemical agents that can alter goblins, their pet spiders, and other creatures into terrifying fighting beasts. Using his formulas, Ziguarz seized power from his weaker kin, becoming chief of the tribe.

Bile Spider warriors vie for the "honor" of using Ziguarz's formulas. They use their newfound strength and viciousness to expand Bile Spider territory, and the tribe is now large. It includes numerous monstrous creatures not often found among mere goblins, and it integrates barbaric bugbears.

Tribal scouts and warriors search far and wide for materials for Ziguarz's alchemy. The tribe is outgrowing its territory. Ziguarz has discovered that his techniques are improved by the use of materials harvested from other sentient beings. He has turned his

eyes toward civilized lands, wondering if his altered soldiers can lead the tribe to greater conquests. He also desires enough slaves, human, elf, dwarf, or otherwise, to fuel his malevolent research.

Adventure Hooks

As the Bile Spiders grow bolder, search wider areas for reagents, and take prisoners for Ziguarz's new line of study, they're unlikely to remain unnoticed for long. Any or all these might be hooks to attract heroic attention. This section uses locations set in the Nentir Vale, which is described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. You can replace them with locations from your own campaign if you wish.

Vanished Caravan: A small caravan was lost on an old trade trail through the wilderness from Nenlast. Travelers that have passed that way report seeing signs of a battle on the road, but little debris and no bodies were apparent. No member of the merchant party appears to have escaped the mysterious attack.

Missing People: A local herbalist named Velma appears to have been snatched in the night from the outskirts of the borderlands village of Nenlast. Her home was carefully looted of all her reagents and supplies. The same night, livestock and a farming family disappeared, with signs of foul play.

Goblin Skirmishes: When coming to trade in Nenlast, Tigerclaw barbarians of the Winterbole Forest report clashes with goblins. Although goblins aren't unusual in the forest, these particular goblins are fierce, sometimes strangely deformed, and they often take prisoners or leave blood-drained corpses.

Alchemical Mutant Rampage: A misshapen rage drake rampaged through a lumber camp near Nenlast a few days ago. It had Dwarven runes inscribed and burned into it, but the language appears to be a mystical form of Goblin. A spider of unusual size and coloration attacked hunters in the Winterbole Forest at about the same time.

Investigation

Depending on the hook, the PCs can look into the problem in a variety of ways. Here, skill challenges help simulate investigation. When characters make skill checks in response to a series of changing conditions, with success or failure being uncertain, they're in a skill challenge. See the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for more on skill challenges.

Vanished Caravan

It's easy enough to find the site at which the caravan was attacked by asking around (Streetwise DC 10). The place is littered with signs of battle.

Setup: For the PCs to discover goblins were behind the attack (the Bile Spider goblin tribe in particular) and from which direction the attack came, the PCs must spend time searching the battle area for clues and putting together the pieces.

Level: 3.

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 2 failures).

Primary Skills: Nature, Perception, History.

Perception DC 20: PCs look for tell-tale clues about the attackers in the detritus of combat. First success with this skill opens up the use of the Nature skill. PCs find broken weaponry, footprints, and a crude iron emblem that looks like a spider.

Perception DC 15: Second success with Perception shows the direction from which the attack came, and to where the attackers retreated (the same direction).

Nature DC 18: The characters can attempt to identify the kinds of creatures that leave a particular size of print behind and the kind of weapons. First success with this challenge opens up the use of the History skill. The footprints are probably goblin and spider, and the weaponry is of goblin make, which means the spider emblem is also likely one used by goblins.

History DC 15: A PC suddenly puts two and two together—a tribe of goblins called the Bile Spiders has been around for some time and it is located in the Nentir Vale. It's unlike the Bile Spiders to be so daring. Success on this check provides general information about the Bile Spider and their role in your campaign's past.

Success: The characters know where to go to find the Bile Spiders goblin tribe. The tracks of the raiders lead into the Winterbole Forest.

Failure: Even a partial failure still lets PCs know from which direction the attackers came and went.

Missing People

Asking around reveals Velma was odd but liked. She had many friends and no enemies (DC 10 Streetwise check). PCs easily learn where to find Velma's home. This skill challenge is provided for Velma's house, but a similar challenge at the farmstead reveals a gruesome clash with goblins and animals, and the tracks of the raiders, which lead into the Winterbole Forest.

Setup: For the PCs to discover that reagents good for alchemy and poisons were taken from Velma's home, that goblin tracks litter the area, and that there was little struggle, the PCs must spend time searching the residence and thinking about what they find.

Level: 3.

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 2 failures).

Primary Skills: Arcana, Heal, Nature, Perception.

Perception DC 20: Characters look for telltale clues in Velma's house. One success allows a PC to find sticky crimson material—is it blood? This opens up the use of the Heal skill.

A second successful Perception check shows signs that Velma was subdued while sleeping, tied with rope (bits of cut rope remain), and dragged away. Muddy footprints of small feet in crude boots lead into, around, and back out of the house. The direction the interlopers departed from the house toward the Winterbole Forest is discernable. This Perception check also opens up the use of the Nature skill.

Heal DC 18: Is the spilled red material blood? Success opens up Arcana skill—no, it's not blood. It's something artificial. Moreover, there is no other sign that Velma was injured.

Arcana DC 20: The dried material is a common alchemical reagent used in mild poisons. Looking around the house reveals that Velma had a supply of alchemical reagents, but they are mostly gone. Little seems disturbed; however the creature that removed the reagents took care to remove them delicately.

Nature DC 18: The PCs can attempt to identify the kinds of creatures that leave a particular size of print behind: Goblins!

Success: The characters know goblins entered the house and probably took the reagents specifically when they took Velma.

Failure: Even a partial failure still lets PCs know from which direction the attackers came. The tracks of the raiders lead into the Winterbole Forest.

Goblin Skirmishes

A few successful Streetwise checks can lead the party to the right Tigerclaw barbarians. Use the previous examples and the entry on skill challenges in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* to design one of your challenges for this investigation.

A negotiation skill challenge involving Diplomacy, Insight, History, and Nature can gain enough information from the barbarians to point the party to a skirmish site and identify the goblins as Bile Spider folk. Tigerclaw barbarians are taciturn and don't like strangers, so the PCs have to earn their trust. The characters can investigate the skirmish area using Arcana, Nature, Heal, and Perception. They discover a slain and deformed goblin, and his body reveals that he was altered by a toxin or foreign substance. The site also has tracks.

Alchemical Mutant Rampage

The bodies of the misshapen beasts can be examined like the body of the goblin in Goblin Skirmishers above. PCs can do legwork among the woodcutters in the lumber camp or talk to the hunters who survived the spider assault.

Use the previous examples and the entry on skill challenges in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* to design one of your challenges for this investigation.

Either is a negotiation skill challenge involving Diplomacy, Insight, History, and Nature. It can reveal the Bile Spider connection and lead the characters into the Winterbole Forest. The rage drake can be tracked easily.

Goblins

A successful Nature check can tell PCs more about goblins in general, as detailed in the Goblin entry of the *Monster Manual*. History can be used to learn more about the Bile Spiders in particular.

Winterbole Forest

Venturing deeper into the Winterbole Forest while seeking the Bile Spider goblins is risky. In any case, tracking the Bile Spider raiders to their lair is a simple skill challenge that can lead to encounters in the Winterbole Forest and eventually to the Bile Spider lair.

Setup: The PCs must track the prints back to the raider lair.

Level: 3.

Complexity: 1 (requires 4 successes before 2 failures).

Primary Skills: Perception.

Perception DC 20: Characters try to follow the tracks through rough forested terrain. Four successes lead them to the lair entrance, but a failure gets PCs off track and potentially triggers an encounter.

Success: The characters discover the entrance to the Bile Spider's cavern lair after a day of travel.

Failure: The PCs spend the day wandering the forest without finding the Bile Spider lair. They also run into trouble. Once they deal with the combat encounter described below, they can attempt the skill challenge again to reacquire the tracks and discover their true goal.

Each additional failure doesn't necessarily indicate a new random encounter, though it could at your option. Reuse the encounter provided below, or better yet, substitute a few monsters of similar level from the *Monster Manual*. Feel free to use anything that a goblin tribe with weird alchemical resources might control.

Combat Encounter: The first time PCs go off track and fail the skill challenge to track the goblins back to the lair, they run into trouble.

Reagent Seekers (Level 3; 775 XP): The mad goblin alchemist Ziguarz sends his minions to search the forest. One altered skullcleaver forms the nucleus of a small group of creatures that roam the forest in search of reagents. The skullcleaver is deformed, bloated, and occasionally burps green gas.

- ✦ *Altered* goblin skullcleaver (level 3 brute)
- ✦ 2 goblin warriors (level 1 skirmisher)
- ✦ Deathjump spider (level 4 skirmisher)
- ✦ 2 goblin sharpshooters (level 2 artillery)

The altered skullcleaver possess the *alchemical breath* power (see below), in addition to its normal abilities. It uses *alchemical breath* as its very first action, then rushes into battle. It fights to the death, but the other goblins might flee, leading the characters back to the Bile Spider lair.

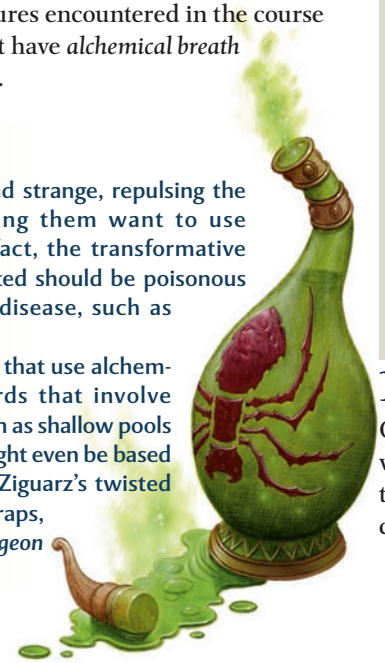
Other altered creatures encountered in the course of this adventure might have *alchemical breath* as an additional power.

THE HAZARDS OF ALCHEMY

Ziguarz's work is described as alchemy. This means you should feel free to give the goblins a few bizarre devices that act like very minor magic items but aren't. See the kobold slinger (*Monster Manual* 168) for some examples. The Bile Spiders have access to deathjump spider venom, and you can use that as an example of other poisons you can create. If you have access to *Adventurer's Vault*, use level-appropriate alchemical devices from that book.

The powers described in this article go a ways toward reinforcing the alchemical take on Ziguarz and the Bile Spiders. By adding descriptive elements, such as deformities that have no actual mechanical effect, you add to the feel of the Bile Spiders. These goblins should seem vile and strange, repulsing the PCs rather than making them want to use Ziguarz's formulas. In fact, the transformative agents Ziguarz has created should be poisonous to the PCs or cause a disease, such as mindfire or slimy doom.

You can include traps that use alchemical devices and hazards that involve alchemical pollution, such as shallow pools of mixed agents. They might even be based on magic traps but use Ziguarz's twisted formulas. For more on traps, see Chapter 5 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.



Alchemical Breath — Altered Attack

Green smog reaches like a living tendril toward its target. The smell is horrendous.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Acid
Standard **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Constitution vs. Will
Hit: 1d6 + Constitution modifier acid damage, and ongoing acid damage equal to Constitution modifier (save ends).

BILE SPIDER CUSTOMIZATION

When constructing the Bile Spider lair, consider the following monsters in addition to goblinoids. Modify fire creatures to deal and resist acid damage instead.

- ✦ Shadowhunter bat, fire bat (*Monster Manual* page 27)
- ✦ Fire beetle, tangler beetle (*Monster Manual* page 30)
- ✦ Cavern choker (*Monster Manual* page 42)—depicted as an altered goblin
- ✦ Guard drake, spitting drake, and rage drake (*Monster Manual* page 90)—use the rage drake sparingly, and depict it as a bloated alchemical brute.
- ✦ Ochre jelly (*Monster Manual* page 202)—depicted as a weird alchemical ooze, maybe with hints of goblin features
- ✦ Rats, especially the dire rat (*Monster Manual* page 219)
- ✦ Blazing skeleton (*Monster Manual* page 235)—use sparingly
- ✦ Deathjump spider, bloodweb spider swarm (*Monster Manual* page 246)—use the bloodweb swarm sparingly
- ✦ Zombies, especially the corruption corpse (*Monster Manual* page 274)—depict as alchemically altered undead goblins or bugbears

Bile Spider Lair

Once PCs reach the goblin caves, you can use a variety of different map types for terrain. Some of the caverns are natural, while the Bile Spiders have carved others.

Social Encounters: Characters can try to Bluff or Intimidate their way into the Bile Spider lair by overcoming a level 3, complexity 3 negotiation skill challenge. Pretending to be emissaries bearing reagents or news of an alliance with other evil forces is the surest way to succeed in this. The guards usher successful PCs to a goblin underboss (*Monster Manual* 138), where another successful negotiation could see the characters to Glax. This is a dangerous gambit, because only the savviest negotiators can avoid violence at that point, and they find enemies on all sides.

Combat Encounters: The way the PCs try to gain entrance to the lair determines the number of encounters they are likely to face. If they try to fight their way directly in or find a secondary entrance and sneak in, they end up facing Bile Spider goblins and their minions before the venturing deep enough to find Ziguarz. Here is one example.

Bile Spider Checkpoint (Level 3; 825 XP): At some point, the PCs have to fight their way past a hardened checkpoint surrounded by goblin living areas. While doing so, they attract the attention of goblins living in the nearby areas, who rush to attack.

- ✦ 1 *altered* goblin hexer (level 3 controller)
- ✦ 1 *altered* needlefang drake swarm (level 2 soldier)
- ✦ 2 goblin sharpshooters (level 2 artillery)
- ✦ 2 goblin warriors (level 1 skirmisher)
- ✦ 4 goblin cutters (level 1 minion)

The hexer, one warrior, and sharpshooters enjoy cover behind a low barricade made of stacked rubble and debris, while the drakes swarm over the barricade. The second goblin warrior and the cutters arrive from nearby rooms at the start of the second round. The warriors chuck their javelins, then fall back if one or more characters pass the barrier. The hexer and sharpshooters stay behind the barricade to launch attacks. The drake swarm attacks the first character within reach.

Important Characters

The leaders of the Bile Spiders are the most dangerous foes the PCs face in this scenario.

Glax, Bile Spider Warchief

The "boss" of the Bile Spiders, Glax ascended to her position with Ziguarz. A bloodthirsty bully with a penchant for eating those that dare oppose her, Glax serves as Ziguarz's military commander. She is placed to lead any major operation the Bile Spiders might one day undertake. Right now, she coordinates units of goblins that venture abroad to collect reagents and harass Bile Spider enemies, such as the Tigerclaw barbarians.

Social Encounter: Glax is bellicose, boastful, and bullying. Only slightly less egotistical than Ziguarz, she's smart enough to realize that the goblin alchemist should be allowed to make important decisions about the Bile Spiders. He has powers beyond Glax's reckoning. It's better to serve than to end up like the Bile Spiders' former chief. But Glax is even more prone to using aggressive and bloody means to solve her problems.

Glax assumes a diplomatic stance toward non-goblin intruders only if one of her underbosses brings such interlopers to her in peace. By using Bluff, Insight, Intimidate, and Religion to succeed on a level 4, complexity 4 skill challenge negotiation, the PCs can continue a diplomatic ruse. Diplomacy checks result in automatic failures during this skill challenge—Glax hates honeyed words, which she takes as a sign of weakness. Religion can be used to discern, by observing the decorations and idols in her lair, that Glax is a pious servant of Bane. She respects others who respect her god. The goblin warchief also respects those who seem strong and bold, hence she pays heed to successful Intimidate checks. Insight can be used to gauge these facts, as well as to observe that the PCs on the road to failing the skill challenge can gain victory by having one of the party members duel Glax's bugbear warrior or Glax.

If the PCs suitably impress Glax with religious and warlike talk, by succeeding in the negotiation, she's willing to send them on to Ziguarz. Her underboss guides the PCs deeper into the Bile Spider lair.

Combat Encounter: If PCs find they must fight Glax, 3rd- or 4th-level PCs discover she and her berserkers are fierce adversaries.

Glax's Brute Squad (Level 5; 1,150 XP): Glax commands several dozen goblins and bugbears, but she keeps her favorites nearby at all times. Of these, Glax keeps the most able with her most hours of the day. She doesn't trust Ziguarz enough to allow any his altered goblins into her personal force. Should any creature displease Glax, her ego demands nothing less than that creature's quick and messy eradication.

- ✦ Glax, female goblin level 5 skullcleaver savage berserker (see template, *Dungeon Master's Guide* 180)
- ✦ 2 goblin skullcleavers (level 3 brute)
- ✦ Bugbear warrior (level 5 brute)
- ✦ Bugbear strangler (level 6 lurker)

Combat with Glax and her brute squad is one of howling violence, goblin oaths of doom, and slavering bloodshed. The brutes lay into the PCs from the outset. Glax and her servants might take minor actions to lick blood from her weapons and engage in other inhuman displays, including a savage coup de grace. They use *goblin tactics* to maneuver into flanking positions, until they become bloodied and totally lose it. Only the bugbear strangler is at all cautious, starting from hiding if she can and waiting until she has a choice target to *strangle* before engaging fully.

Ziguarz, Bile Spider King

Ziguarz is a black-hearted and devious goblin who is drunk with accursed magic and newfound power. He's vain, arrogant, and paranoid, and he's willing to sacrifice any of his underlings for any purpose he

deems worthy. He's also willing to torture, maim, and kill to continue to expand his powers.

Social Encounter: Ziguarz is loud, depraved, foppish in a goblin way, pompous, and prone to random violence. He's willing to listen to flattery and accept bribes. The goblin alchemist is insane enough to believe that other evil forces might seek his aid.

If the characters made it this far peacefully by posing as emissaries, Ziguarz can be fooled into listening to them. By using Bluff, Diplomacy, Insight, and Arcana to succeed on a level 4, complexity 4 negotiation, the PCs can pose as emissaries from another evil force. Intimidate checks result in automatic failures during this skill challenge, since Ziguarz considers himself above petty threats. By promising alliances and trade, the characters can pump Ziguarz for information on his plans and even be allowed to leave the Bile Spider Lair in amity.

During negotiations, PCs can discern through Insight that Ziguarz's main weakness is the arrogance formed during his dramatic rise to prominence among the Bile Spiders. This overconfidence has led him to allow his warriors and freed experiments to attract attention before the Bile Spider tribe is ready to face tough opposition. He dismisses suggestions that he should be more careful with an amused wave of his hand. Insight also quickly tells the characters that this is in part because Ziguarz's experiments have made him unhinged, probably due to a mix of toxic agents he has accidentally ingested and unthinkable transformations he has witnessed.

Combat Encounter: If swords are drawn against Ziguarz, 3rd- or 4th-level PCs find they have a serious fight on their hands.

Mad Goblin Alchemist (Level 6; 1,475 XP): The mad goblin alchemist Ziguarz is not so mad as to go anywhere without his personal coterie of alchemically animated undead servitors. Moreover, Ziguarz has a few tricks of his own. The zombie hulk is the previous Bile Spider chieftain that Ziguarz supplanted, then reanimated and "improved" with his terrible alchemical knowledge.

✦ Ziguarz, male *altered* goblin level 6 hexer demagogue (see template, *Dungeon Master's Guide* 178)
✦ 1 goblin skullcleaver (level 3 brute)
✦ 1 clay scout (homunculus, level 2 lurker)
✦ 2 *altered* deathjump spiders (level 4 skirmisher)
✦ 1 *altered* zombie hulk (level 8 brute)

When a fight beckons, Ziguarz covers his allies and the PCs with a *vexing cloud*, then uses an action point to use *stinging hex*, *blinding hex*, or *alchemical breath*. The skull cleaver and zombie hulk hurl themselves at the PC party's front line. Deathjump spiders use *death from above* to deliver their deadly attacks.

Ziguarz tries to stay adjacent to his skullcleaver bodyguard, using *lead from the rear* to transfer damage to the skullcleaver. Once Ziguarz is bloodied, his *alchemical juggernaut* power comes into play. The goblin alchemist uses *clever escape* (a demagogue power) to escape when the battle turns sour. He believes that if he is struck down, he will return even stronger than before from one of his hidden alchemical crèches (maybe he's delusional, maybe not–it's up to you).

Alchemical Juggernaut — Altered Utility

With the sound of breaking clay and a billow of bilious green smoke, you warp, your eyes smoke and then flare with an emerald flame, and your skin glistens with a green sheen.

Daily ✦ Acid, Arcane, Polymorph
Minor Action Personal
Effect: You can spend a healing surge and gain regeneration 5. Until the end of the encounter, all of your attacks deal extra acid damage equal to your Constitution modifier (minimum 1).

INSIDIOUS GOBLINS

Goblins are often depicted as pesky rabble, incompetent savages, and comic relief. Sinister goblins, maybe with a little black humor thrown in for spice, seem more fun to me, though. After all, a goblin murders, steal, and even engages in cannibalism if it has a reason to do so. It is devoted to dark spirits and evil gods, whom it serves out of fear. The terror and suffering of others is inconsequential, even desirable, to goblins as groups and individuals. A goblin takes what it can, from wealth to power.

Good examples of this type of goblin can be found in literature, movies, and Dungeons & Dragons. The goblins of The Hobbit and the Lord of the Rings are great examples of evil and selfish goblin behavior, although one might use them as an example of hobgoblins as well. Although most of the goblins from the 1985 Ridley Scott film Legend were just goofy, the goblin Blix is a fine example of how the worst goblins should be–wicked, selfish, and grasping, but cowed by superior force. Monte Cook also introduced truly depraved goblins in the Goblins of Ao-Rach in Book of Vile Darkness. The Bile Spiders are direct descendants of Monte's degenerate goblins.

About the Authors

Chris Sims started out working for small d20 companies in 2003, then landed a freelance editor gig for Wizards RPG R&D. Wizards finally got annoyed enough by his constant applications to hire him as the *Duel Masters* editor in 2005. From there, Chris wheedled his way into RPG R&D as an editor, and finally became a story designer after masterminding a few choice assassinations. His credits include *Monster Manual V*, *Secrets of Sarlona*, *Rules Compendium*, and the *Eberron Survival Guide* (thanks, Logan!).

Bruce Cordell is a D&D designer, but during his twelve years in the game industry, he has dabbled in miniatures, board games, collectible card games, d20 games, and more. Bruce has over a sixty listed credits to his name, including the *Expanded Psionics Handbook*, *Libris Mortis*, and *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft*. His body of work also includes three published *Forgotten Realms* novels (*Lady of Poison*, *Darkvision*, and *Stardeep*), with more on the way.

Hazards of Dark Sun

BY GARY ASTLEFORD

illustrations by Brian Hagan

Athas, the world of the Dark Sun® campaign setting, presented Dungeons & Dragons players with one of the most challenging environments ever conceived of in a roleplaying game. It was a strange and alien world populated by a myriad of terrifying creatures and unusual races. Though metal was a rarity, psionics were everywhere. The beasts that characters encountered beyond the walls of the seven city-states were dangerous, but they were not the only hazards that heroes faced.

Many times, the threat was right in front of you: a cactus bristling with poisoned spines, or the sword-like fronds of a jungle bush. Predatory plants aren't unheard of in other campaign settings, but Athas is a special exception. When the very sand you walk upon might be home to a score of barbed, hypodermiclike spines, traveling from place to place gains a whole new set of risks.

Dew Frond

Though the Athasian deserts are renowned for their hazardous cacti, the verdant jungles of Dark Sun are literally brimming with dangerous plants. One of the most dangerous of these is the dew frond.

Dew Frond — **Level 4 Obstacle**
Hazard — 175 XP

Dew fronds easily blend with the foliage of their tropical surroundings. Young fronds are 3 to 5 feet tall and yellow-tan in color.

Hazard: An individual dew frond plant consists of four separate, barbed fronds growing from a single central stalk, and each frond acts independently of the other three. Dew fronds feed on the blood of passing animals, and when feeding they grow at a frightening rate.

Perception

No check is necessary to notice a dew frond.

Additional Skill: Nature

✦ DC 17: The character identifies the plant as a dew frond.

Trigger

The dew frond attacks when a creature enters or begins its turn in or adjacent to a square of dew fronds. A dew frond that has restrained a creature cannot make other attacks until the restrained creature has escaped.

Attack

Opportunity Action **Melee**

Target: Creature in or adjacent to dew frond

Attack: +8 vs. AC

Hit: 2d6 damage, and the target is restrained and takes ongoing 3 damage (until escape).

Effect: Each time a dew frond deals damage, it regains 5 hit points and grows 6 inches tall.

Countermeasures

✦ Restrained characters can use the escape action (DC 19) to free themselves. A failed escape check results in an extra 1d6 damage.

✦ A character can attack a dew frond (AC 12, Fortitude 10, Reflex 10; hp 39).

Sand Cactus

One of Athas's most notorious predators is nearly invisible to the naked eye. Submerged beneath the surface of the world's sandy wastes, the sand cactus poses a constant threat to heroes and passing creatures.

Sand Cactus **Level 6 Obstacle**
Hazard 250 XP

The sand cactus is a passive predatory plant. Thankfully rare, a sand cactus lives just beneath the surface of the sandy wastes.

Hazard: A sand cactus lurks below the surface, only exposing a few dozen barbed needles that surround the mawlike orifice through which it feeds. The color of these needles matches the sand in which the cactus is buried, which makes the needles exceptionally difficult to spot. A single sand cactus can spread its needles out to affect a 4-square-by-4-square area. Ongoing damage is cumulative for a creature that has been stuck by multiple needles.

Perception

✦DC 26: The character notices the sand cactus's needles sticking above the surface of the sand.

Additional Skill: Nature

✦DC 18: The character identifies the plant as a sand cactus.

Trigger

The sand cactus attacks when a creature enters or begins its turn in a square that contains the sand cactus's needles.

Attack

Opportunity Action **Melee**
Target: One creature
Attack: +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 damage, and the target is restrained and takes ongoing 5 damage (until escape).
Miss: Half damage.

Countermeasures

✦Restrained characters can use the escape action (DC 17) to free themselves. A successful escape check results in an extra 1d10 damage.

✦A character can attack an uncovered sand cactus only (AC 14, Fortitude 12, Reflex 14; hp 51). A sand cactus is buried 5 feet below the sand's surface.

Spider Cactus

One of Athas's most active predatory plants is the spider cactus, which is found clustered in groups of two to eight individuals. The sinister nature of the spider cactus is betrayed by the bones of creatures that have fallen victim to it.

Spider Cactus **Level 3 Obstacle**
Hazard 150 XP

A spider cactus stands between 6 and 7 feet tall. The plant is bright green with white vertical streaks that run the length of its body.

Hazard: A spider cactus hunts by firing barbed purple needles at prey. Skewered prey are then dragged to the base of the cactus, where they can be pierced by large, green feeding needles. A spider cactus grows among others of its kind in patches along roads, paths, or other prey-rich areas.

Perception

No check is necessary to notice the spider cactus.

Additional Skill: Nature

✦DC 20: The character identifies the plant as a spider cactus.

Initiative +4

Trigger

The cactus attacks any single creature within 3 squares, using its ranged attack against distant enemies and melee attack against those within range.

Attack

Standard Action **Ranged** 3
Target: One creature
Attack: +8 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 damage, and the target is immobilized (until escape), and pulled 1 square.

Attack

Standard Action **Melee** 1
Target: One creature
Attack: +9 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage, and immobilized until escape.

Countermeasures

✦Restrained characters can use the escape action (DC 16) to free themselves. A successful escape check results in an extra 1d8 damage.

✦A character can attack a spider cactus (AC 11, Fortitude 11, Reflex 11; hp 33).

✦A spider cactus's needle tethers can be cut (AC 15, Fortitude 15, Reflex 15; hp 5), freeing a trapped character.

About the Author

Gary Astleford has been a freelance writer and game designer since 2003. In that time, he has been fortunate enough to write for companies such as Black Industries, Fantasy Flight Games, Green Ronin, and Wizards of the Coast, to name a few. Currently, he lives in Fairfax, Virginia, with his wife and two children.

Class Acts: Wizard

Deception and trickery abound with new illusion powers!

BY RODNEY THOMPSON

illustration by Carl Frank

Few wizard archetypes are more recognizable than the illusionist, a spellcaster that calls up false images and sounds using arcane power to fool, confuse, and otherwise befuddle his foes. An illusionist uses magic to toy with the minds of his enemies, convincing them to see and hear things where they are not—and to ignore things that should be right in front of their faces. Illusion spells turn their enemies' senses against them, causing their eyes and ears to deceive them and tricking them into performing actions they normally would not. Some illusions are so realistic that they can convince a foe's mind to make the illusion real, causing trauma and even death.

Members of the wizard class who wish to specialize in the magic of illusions can use the following spells throughout the heroic tier.

Level 1 Wizard At-Will Spells

Illusory Ambush — Wizard Attack 1

You create an illusion of swirling spectral assailants that swarm over your enemy.

At-Will ✦ Arcane, Illusion, Implement, Psychic
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Intelligence vs. Will
Hit: 1d6 + Intelligence modifier psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of your next turn.

Increase damage to 2d6 + Intelligence modifier at 21st level.

Level 1 Wizard Encounter Spells

Grasping Shadows — Wizard Attack 1

At your command, the shadows reach out, grab hold of your foes, and wreath the area in darkness.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Illusion, Implement, Psychic
Standard Action **Area** burst 1 within 10 squares
Target: Each creature in burst
Attack: Intelligence vs. Will
Hit: 1d8 + Intelligence modifier psychic damage, and target is slowed until the end of your next turn.
Effect: Shadows writhe in the designated area and continue until the end of your next turn. Any creature that enters the area of the grasping shadows takes psychic damage equal to your Intelligence modifier and is slowed until the end of its next turn.

Level 1 Wizard Daily Spells

Phantom Chasm — Wizard Attack 1

You create the image of a bottomless chasm that opens beneath your foes, convincing them that they are plummeting to their deaths.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Illusion, Implement, Psychic
Standard Action **Area** burst 1 within 20 squares
Target: Each creature in burst
Attack: Intelligence vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + Intelligence modifier psychic damage, and the target is prone and immobilized until the end of its next turn.

Miss: The target is immobilized until the end of your next turn.

Level 2 Wizard Utility Spells

Phantasmal Terrain — Wizard Utility 2

You make already treacherous terrain even more difficult for your enemies to traverse.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Illusion, Implement, Zone
Standard Action **Area** burst 2 within 10 squares
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, difficult terrain in the designated area costs 2 extra squares of movement instead of the normal 1 extra square for your enemies. Additionally, hazards and traps within the area gain a bonus to attack rolls equal to your Intelligence modifier against your enemies.

Level 3 Wizard Encounter Spells

Maze of Mirrors — Wizard Attack 3

You envelop your enemies in an illusory labyrinth made of mirrors, which conceals the world around them.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Illusion, Implement
Standard Action **Area** burst 1 within 10 squares
Target: Each creature in burst
Attack: Intelligence vs. Will
Hit: The target is immobilized and takes a penalty to attack rolls equal to your Intelligence modifier until the end of your next turn.

Level 5 Wizard Daily Spells

Phantasmal Assailant — Wizard Attack 5

You craft an elaborate image of a deadly assassin whose blade cuts deeply into your foes.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Illusion, Implement, Psychic
Standard Action **Ranged** 20
Target: One creature
Attack: Intelligence vs. Will
Hit: 2d10 + Intelligence modifier psychic damage.
Effect: The target takes ongoing 5 psychic damage and grants combat advantage to all your allies (save ends both).

Level 6 Wizard Utility Spells

Spectral Hound — Wizard Utility 6

You summon the ghostly image of a powerful mastiff that follows you protectively.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Illusion, Implement
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Effect: You create the illusion a spectral hound, which appears in a square you designate within range. The spectral hound does not occupy that square but does count as an ally for the purposes of flanking. Additionally, as long as the hound remains within 10 squares of you, you gain a +1 power bonus to AC and all defenses, along with a +5 power bonus to Perception checks, since the spectral hound warns you of approaching danger.

Sustain Minor: You can sustain this power until the end of the encounter. Each round you can move the hound up to 5 squares as a free action; the spectral hound ignores difficult terrain but the effect ends if the hound leaves your line of sight.

Level 7 Wizard Encounter Spells

Enemies Abound — Wizard Attack 7

You weave a veil of illusion over the eyes your enemies, causing them to view their allies as threats.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Illusion, Implement, Psychic
Standard Action **Area** burst 1 within 20 squares
Target: Each enemy in burst
Attack: Intelligence vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + Intelligence modifier psychic damage, and you and your allies can treat the target as an ally for the purposes of flanking until the end of your next turn.

Level 10 Wizard Utility Spells

Illusory Wall — Wizard Utility 10

A seemingly solid wall materializes before your foes, dividing the battlefield with your convincing illusion.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Illusion, Implement
Standard Action **Area** wall 8 within 20 squares
Effect: You create the illusion of a contiguous wall of solid material (stone or metal, for example). The wall can be up to 8 squares long and 4 squares high. The wall blocks line of sight for all enemies (but not your allies). When any enemy moves adjacent to or starts its turn adjacent to the wall, as a free action you can make an attack (Intelligence vs. Will) against that target; if successful, the target treats the wall as blocking terrain (save ends). On a miss, the wall no longer blocks line of sight or movement for that creature for the remainder of the encounter.

Sustain Minor: You can sustain this power until the end of the encounter.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is a game designer at Wizards of the Coast, Inc. His previous design credits include the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* Saga Edition, the *Starships of the Galaxy* supplement, and the *Knights of the Old Republic Campaign Guide* supplement.

EBERRON

The Forest of Flesh

BY KEITH BAKER

illustrations by Brian Hagan and Chris Burdett

Mordain the Fleshweaver is the subject of dozens of horrifying tales. One story describes an early effort to create a new dragonmarked house, which instead produced a line of foulspawn that devoured Mordain's own family. Mothers tell their children that Mordain steals disobedient youths for his experiments, replacing them with perfect simulacra so their parents never know. Whatever the truth of these stories, Mordain was excoriated from House Phiarlan in 797 YK. According to the records of Salyon Syrralan d'Sivis, the Twelve tried to execute Mordain and failed. Salyon's account states that Mordain was bathed in acid, burned at the stake, drowned, and even dismembered, and after each attempt "he rose again, his vigor unchecked and flesh rebound." He was petrified and sent to Dreadhold, but he escaped before reaching the island prison; Salyon speculated that "no lesser mage could set his will over the flesh of Mordain."

The first confirmed sighting of Blackroot—Mordain's tower—occurred in 873 YK. In the heat of the Silver Purge, a troop of Aundairian templars pursued a few werewolves far to the south of modern Aundair. Weeks later, another patrol encountered a lone survivor, half-mad and delirious. He spoke of a tower "with blackened, leathery walls, twisted as the limb of a dragon reaching up to grasp the sun." The soldier couldn't account for his companions, and his own condition was testimony to the horrors he had seen. His upper torso had been fused to the lower body of what was posthumously confirmed to be a werewolf. His mental state quickly deteriorated and he soon died of self-inflicted wounds.

Blackroot's location has long since been confirmed, though the tower is shielded from scrying and divination. Virtuous champions have set out to destroy the foul wizard and his works. Emissaries from the Five Nations sought his aid in the Last War, and mages have dreamed of stealing his secrets. However, few gaze on the face of Mordain and return unchanged . . . assuming they return at all.

KhreshtRhyyl: The Forest of Flesh

Droaam is home to many fearsome creatures. Medusas match wits with harpies and hags. Ogres, minotaurs, and trolls compete in tests of might. Even these monsters avoid the lands around Blackroot. The gnolls call it *KhreshtRhyyl*, "the Forest of Flesh"—and this is more than a colorful figure of speech. Long

SEEKING THE FLESHWEAVER

Mordain matches one of the greatest mystical talents of the millennium with an utter disregard for the suffering of others. What could bring a group of adventurers to Blackroot? A wizard might hope to acquire the unknown rituals and potent implements locked away in the tower. A Brelish paladin could make it his quest to remove this dark shadow from the border of his homeland. Mordain need not be an enemy, though. He lacks empathy or morality, so he often inflicts terrible suffering when it furthers his quest for knowledge. However, Mordain has no interest in doing evil for its own sake, and any of his experiments could end up serving a greater good. His vast knowledge could be the key to averting a terrible catastrophe, and he might possess information or items that the PCs need to pursue a quest. A few examples are presented below.

1. The adventurers have business in Khazaak Draal, realm of medusas and basilisks. It's said that Mordain can provide adventurers with absolute protection against petrification. Mordain does nothing for free, and he has no interest in gold; he asks for a service or sacrifice before he bestows any of his gifts.

2. Following an encounter with a previously unknown aberration, a PC is afflicted with a condition that defies all forms of mundane and magical treatment. At first it grants the victim useful powers, but it soon becomes clear that the affliction is turning the victim into an aberration—and that it will destroy his mind when it has wound its course. If anyone can lift this curse, it's Mordain. Is this disease a relic of the daelkyr, or is it the work of Mordain?

3. In addition to his knowledge of aberrations, Mordain is the foremost authority on aberrant dragonmarks. When a new wave of aberrant marks appears across Khorvaire, the Twelve sends the PCs to seek Mordain's insight on the matter. Alternatively, an adventurer with an aberrant mark learns that the Fleshweaver has a hoard of aberrant focus items; perhaps she can earn one of these treasures by working for the wizard.

4. House Jorasco hires the party to retrieve a viable sample of a particular plant from the lands around Mordain's tower, or House Vadalis seeks one of the strange beasts Mordain has created. The party might not have to deal with Mordain, though removing things from the domain of the Fleshweaver can have unforeseen consequences.

5. A colorful bird with four wings and two heads approaches a PC trained in Arcana and rituals. This beast carries a message from Mordain that summons the character to Blackroot. No reason is given. Does the Fleshweaver seek an apprentice? Does he have a gift to bestow—some creation he wishes to test in the world? Or has he foreseen the character's epic destiny and now wishes to shape it for his own ends?

6. A PC discovers that some of the people closest to him have been replaced by near-perfect simulacrums. This can only be the work of Mordain the Fleshweaver, but why has he done this? Can the heroes free the originals from Mordain's tower?

7. Many humanoid races have yet to be given a major role in the setting. If the DM wants to add a particular race to the setting, a city of these creatures can appear on the border of Droaam and Breland. This is Mordain's work. Can the inhabitants come to terms with their new neighbors, or will minor skirmishes threaten to turn into a full-scale war between Breland and Droaam? Is this Mordain's intent?

ago Mordain released creatures called skinweavers (see below) into the woods. These beasts weave webs, much as spiders do, but instead of producing silk, skinweavers craft their nests using the recycled flesh of their victims, stretching entrails, strands of muscle, and flayed skin between trunk and bough. Many of these are long abandoned, like cobwebs drifting in the wind. Nonetheless, gnawed bones and glistening strands of flesh are a common sight in the forest, and they serve as a clear warning to turn back.

The woods of KhreshtRhyyl are unusually dense and humid for Droaam, which is one more sign of the power Mordain holds over this region. The canopy above remains dense throughout the year, and even at high noon only dim light makes its way to the forest floor. Anyone trained in Dungeoneering can recognize certain plants that are found underground only; this includes phosphorescent fungi that create paths of light snaking through the darkness. Other plants are unknown beyond the forest. These include potent hallucinogens; bloodvines, which produce human blood in place of sap; banshee's boughs, trees that howl in agony when disturbed in any way; and many others. The ghoul's rose produces the stench of rotting flesh to attract insects, and the beautiful stormflower deals lightning damage to anything that touches it (1 lightning damage for touching a flower, up to 6 lightning damage per round for standing in a patch of stormflowers).

The creatures of the region are as diverse and dangerous as the plant life. Some are aberrations, though most are bestial creatures unique to the area as opposed to being servants of Xoriat or Khyber. The skinweavers are one example of Mordain's ingenuity, but tales speak of skinless wolves, insane elementals, and frenzied beasts formed from the combination of two or more of the creatures found elsewhere in Droaam. Adventurers might find a troll with the voice and wings of a harpy, or a hydra with a medusa's

head sprouting from each of its six necks. Rot scarabs, bloodweb spiders, and stranger insects chitter in the darkness. Vine horrors, oozes of colors never seen in the world beyond, and aberrant dryads linger just off the phosphorescent paths. The laws of nature have been shattered here. Characters familiar with Nature or Dungeoneering may claim that it's impossible for so many deadly creatures to thrive in such close proximity to one another, and this again is the work of Mordain. Many of these monsters have been engineered to survive with minimal sustenance, and predatory instincts and reproductive systems have likewise been altered; some beasts reproduce at a remarkable rate needed to maintain their numbers, and others are sterile and could be exterminated by travelers. Because of this, even the most innocent creatures can pose a deadly threat. The *tryyl*, a rodent found in the forest, is a little creature possessing the adorable traits of rabbit and hamster. But a tryyl also has poisonous flesh, a venomous bite, and an uncanny reproduction rate held in check by its diet within the forest. Should a few of these creatures be brought to Breland or Aundair, they could quickly spread across the land and become an environmental menace. Both the Gnoll Brotherhood and the Wardens of the Wood have dealt with tryyl before, and they react violently if they discover adventurers smuggling these or any other creatures from KhreshtRhyyl.

Although the monsters are the obvious threat, travelers face other hazards when passing through the forest. Overland speed is cut in half due to the dense growth and obstacles, and in tactical situations much of the land should be considered difficult terrain; alternatively, an adventurer who fails a Nature check (DC 18; PCs should be allowed to make passive checks) could unwittingly walk into a patch of stormflowers or disturb a banshee's bough. All Perception checks in the woods take a -2 penalty due to the constant cacophony of strange insects, scurrying tryyl, and the distant howls of trees and beasts alike.

Tales speak of skinless wolves, insane elementals, and frenzied beasts formed from the combination of two or more of the creatures found elsewhere in Droaam.

Due to the strange nature of the region, PCs can use either Dungeoneering or Nature for foraging, but an adventurer takes a -5 penalty to the check—and with the number of poisonous and hallucinogenic substances in the woods (including the mucus the skinweavers use to preserve their fleshy webs) failure can have unpleasant consequences. One of the most common maladies is a disease known as verdant whispers; however, the DM should feel free to introduce other diseases.

If they can survive the dangers of the forest, adventurers eventually come to a vast clearing at its heart, where the tower of Blackroot reaches up toward the sky. On close examination, the windowless tower appears to be made from the flesh of a black dragon; the walls bleed if damaged, though they regenerate at an astonishing rate. In some of the stories, Mordain welcomes visitors into the open gates of the tower; in others they must battle vicious guardians or carve a passage through the bleeding walls. The reception visitors receive depends on their purpose, as well as whether Mordain thinks of them as guests—or raw material for his next round of experiments.

Skinweaver

No corpse is wasted in Mordain's domain. The skinweaver builds webs from skin and muscle, stretching entrails between trees and bones in a grotesque mockery of a spider. Heads and hands become hosts for the foul creatures' spawn. Some might

Verdant Whispers	**Level 6 Disease**
Spread by touch, verdant whispers causes victims to enter a delirious state.	**Attack:** +11 vs. Fortitude **Endurance** improve DC 22, maintain DC 17, worsen DC 16 or lower

The target is cured.

◀ **Initial Effect** The target takes a -2 penalty to Perception checks. In addition, the target can perceive nonexistent sounds or motion in its peripheral vision.

◀▶ The target takes a -2 penalty to AC, Reflex, and Will defense due to its inability to focus on its surroundings.

◀▶ The Perception penalty is increased to -4 because the false sensory input grows worse.

▶ **Final State** The target must make a saving throw at the end of each turn. If the target fails, on its next turn it makes a melee attack against a random creature within 5 squares of it, charging if the target has to do so. If no creatures are within 5 squares, the target does nothing but move in a randomly chosen direction. At this point, the target has completely lost touch with reality and is living in a world of waking nightmares.

assume that skinweavers could be created only from the bodies of warlocks or wizards, but the arcane powers of these creatures are instinctual; thanks to Mordain's twisted skills, a fighter's head can also cast spells in the Forest of Flesh.

Although skinweavers can induce decomposition, a skinweaver head can also produce a clear mucus that preserves flesh. This has an effect similar to *gentle repose*, and it preserves the creatures' webs. Most skinweavers work in the midst of a network of vile strands, which are treated as difficult terrain. A skinweaver's forest walk allows it to ignore its own webs.

Description

Skinweavers are formed from the severed hands and heads of humanoid beings. The flesh is perfectly preserved, and a skinweaver head can even be beautiful—until one takes a closer look. The heads have six spindly, chitinous legs protruding from the sides of the skull and two smaller foreclaws, with a spiderlike abdomen sealing the base of the neck. A skinweaver hand is severed beneath the wrist and mounted on an armored body similar to that of a scorpion, with the hand in place of the scorpion's tail. Skinweaver flesh is far tougher than that of the original humanoid, and these creatures can take a surprising amount of damage.

Skinweaver hands are psychically bound to a particular skinweaver head, and they act with perfect, silent coordination. If a skinweaver group is present, determine initiative only for the heads; the hands act on the same phase as their linked head. If a skinweaver head is killed, its linked hands immediately focus their attacks on the killer and continue to fight until slain. If the hands survive, they seek a new head with which to bond. Skinweavers do not employ any language, but the heads are excellent mimics and repeat phrases said around them in battle.

A skinweaver head can even be beautiful—until one takes a closer look. The heads have six spindly, chitinous legs protruding from the sides of the skull and two smaller foreclaws, with a spiderlike abdomen . . .

Skinweaver Hand **Level 8 Artillery**
Small aberrant magical beast (blind) XP 350

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +9; blindsight 10, tremorsense 10
HP 74; **Bloodied** 37
AC 20; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 18
Immune disease; **Resist** 5 necrotic, 5 poison
Speed 5 (forest walk), climb 5

Unclean Touch (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+15 vs. AC; 1d4 damage plus ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).

Rotting Hex (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Reach 10; +13 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 4 necrotic damage. If the target moves closer to the hand on the target's next turn, the target takes an additional 1d6 + 4 necrotic damage.

Rending Bolt (standard; encounter) ✦ **Necrotic**
Area burst 3 within 20; +13 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 4 necrotic damage and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage, and no ongoing damage.

Choke Hold (standard; sustain standard; encounter) ✦ **Necrotic**
+15 vs. AC; 10 necrotic damage, and that target is dazed and immobilized (until escape), and the skinweaver hand enters the target's space and is immobilized until the end of the hand's next turn. The skinweaver hand can sustain the power as a standard action. If it does, the target takes an additional 10 necrotic damage and the effect continues until the end of the hand's next turn. If the hand is forced out of the target's space, it cannot sustain this power.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Skills Athletics +8, Stealth +14, Thievery +14

Str 8 (+3)	**Dex** 20 (+9)	**Wis** 10 (+4)
Con 20 (+9)	**Int** 6 (+2)	**Cha** 14 (+6)

Skinweaver Hand Tactics

Skinweaver webs create patches of rough terrain, but the skinweavers can ignore these webs due to forest walk. The hands use their mobility to keep their distance from an opponent, relying on ranged attacks. Occasionally one hand uses stealth to ambush a party, launching a preemptive choking attack against a lightly armored caster while the head and hands strike from a distance. The hands are clever enough to use their rending bolts in relays, so they don't waste the ongoing damage on an opponent who is afflicted by another hand's bolt.

Skinweaver Head	**Level 10 Controller**
Small aberrant magical beast	XP 500

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +12; darkvision
Crawling Flesh aura 6; enemies within the aura take a -1 penalty to attack rolls and reduce their necrotic resistance by 10.
HP 108; **Bloodied** 54
AC 24; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 23
Immune disease; **Resist** 15 necrotic, 5 poison
Speed 5 (forest walk), climb 5

Vicious Bite (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
+15 vs. AC; 1d6 damage plus ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).

Dreadful Word (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fear, Psychic**
Ranged 5; +14 vs. Will; 2d6 + 5 psychic damage, and the target takes a -3 penalty to Will defense until the end of the skinweaver head's next turn.

Mucus Web (standard; encounter) ✦ **Zone**
Area burst 2 within 15; +14 vs. Reflex; target is immobilized (save ends); creates a zone of difficult terrain; any creature that ends its turn in the zone is slowed (save ends). The zone lasts for the duration of the encounter.

Fleshweaving (move; recharge ⚁ ⚂) ✦ **Healing**
Close burst 2; skinweavers in the burst regain 10 hit points.

Arcane Mimicry (standard; recharge ⚀ ⚁ ⚂)
The skinweaver head can use one encounter or at-will wizard power of 10th level or below that has been used in the last round and within 10 squares of the head. This is considered to be a standard action, even if the original power was a move or minor action. If the power is an attack, the skinweaver's attack bonus is +14 and its damage modifier is +5.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Skills Arcana +13, Bluff +15, Insight +12

Str 6 (+3)	**Dex** 14 (+7)	**Wis** 15 (+7)
Con 20 (+10)	**Int** 16 (+8)	**Cha** 20 (+10)

Skinweaver Head Tactics

Merely moving close to a skinweaver head causes a creature's flesh to crawl. A head uses existing obstacles and its disgusting *mucus web* to hold enemies at bay, which allows its hands to strike from afar. If an enemy uses an arcane power against the skinweavers, a head can mimic the spell in the caster's own voice, flinging the power back against the party. Though a skinweaver head appears to display intelligence through its actions, it does not speak and instead mockingly mimics speech it hears.

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of Dungeons & Dragons since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the *Eberron Campaign Setting* and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

Under the Hood of the DMG

by James Wyatt

What goes into designing a book like the *Dungeon Master's Guide?*

It's hard to answer that question without using the phrase "the kitchen sink." The *DMG* is jam-packed with information, and in many ways it's a distillation of the design of the whole edition. It didn't take anything like its final form until the *Player's Handbook* and *Monster Manual* were nearly finished, but all the wisdom and math that underlie the game come to the fore when we explain to the Dungeon Master how to run the game and how to design for the game.

The best way to give some insight into the book's inner workings, I think, is to take a tour through the book chapter by chapter. I'll highlight an element of each chapter that illustrates an important aspect of the design, development, writing, and sometimes editing that went into each part. Feel free to grab your shiny new *DMG* and walk through it with me.

Chapter 1: How to Be a DM

There's a section in Chapter 1 (pages 8-10) about player motivations. The section has a lot in common with the similar section of the 3rd Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide II,* and that's because they both owe their existence to some heavy thinking that took place in R&D around 2003. At that time, we pooled our collective experience and some objective research and sketched out the reasons we thought different people played and derived enjoyment from D&D. Everyone has observed the spectrum, from the die-hard roleplayer to the tactical mastermind, and I think just about every group has the guy who's only interested in the game as a social activity. It helped us at the time to think about these psychographics as we made decisions about what to put in our books—trying to make sure that our products appeal to the Shakespeares as well as the Caesars, as we called some of our psychographics.

Our department wasn't the only place this kind of thinking was happening, of course. Robin Laws, an eminent figure in the game industry and one of the authors of the *DMG2*, is particularly famous for a little book called *Robin's Laws of Good Game Mastering* (published in 2002 by Steve Jackson Games). First in his own book and then in *DMG2,* Robin applied the same psychographic principles to help Dungeon Masters understand the other players at the table and craft a game that appeals to those players.

Building on all that groundwork, Chris Sims and I put together two and a half pages in the first chapter of the new *DMG* intended to help the DM create a fun game for the players at the table. We don't go on for columns of text about each motivation. We certainly don't try to suggest that some motivations are better or purer than others. Instead, we simply present three short bullet lists for each motivation:

- The key characteristics of different kinds of players.
- Concrete ways that DMs can engage and reward these players.
- Some ways that player motivations, taken to extremes, can become disruptive to the game.

That's not where it ends, though. Several places in the rest of the book return to this groundwork to help make the DM's job easier. Check out Chapter 2 (pages 18, 28, 32-33), Chapter 6 (pages 101, 105, 115), and Chapter 8 (page 145).

Chapter 2: Running the Game

One of the things that became clear in early playtests of 4th Edition was that this game required a different approach to DM-player communication than past editions. Because the game is so strongly exceptions-based, it's easy for the players to get hit with some really nasty surprises. It really comes to the fore in combat, but our thinking about the issue expanded it into a more general principle: It's essential that the players have enough information to make smart decisions.

The clearest example in combat has to do with monsters that have so-called "gotcha!" abilities. For example, a boneclaw has threatening reach, an exception to the general rule that characters and monsters can only make opportunity attacks against adjacent enemies. When a character who's not adjacent to the boneclaw takes an opportunity attack for moving or using a ranged attack, it's all too easy for the player to feel unduly punished. It's part of the DM's job to communicate the danger so that players can make informed decisions about what they do. Some DMs will choose to be totally explicit: "Oh, this guy has threatening reach. Are you sure you want to do that?" Others will be more narrative about it: "This creature's claws are in constant motion, and it seems very aware of you. Your instinct tells you you're not safe from those claws, even at this distance." Either way, players have the information they need.

The principle goes beyond combat, though. Many of us have played in games where we spent hours searching for the fun, because the structure of the adventure or the meanness of the DM kept us from finding the information we needed to keep things moving. Nobody has fun as those hours stretch on, so we formulated the "Information Imperative" (page 26): Give the players the information they need to keep the adventure going.

Once again, it's a principle we tried to carry through the rest of the book: in narration (page 22), skill challenges (page 75), and adventure design (page 101).

Here's the playtest feedback that directly led to this section of the DMG:

From: "Baker, Rich"
Date: Thu, 20 Sep 2007 09:42:52
Subject: Too much "Gotcha-ness" in monsters?

So, one of the things that really puts a sour taste in my mouth is the gotcha-ness of our current monster designs.

"Gotcha-ness" I define as random things monsters do to break rules and punish me for taking what would otherwise seem to be logical and well-reasoned actions in the fight.

We should be really, really careful about Gotcha! abilities. At the very least, every time a monster has a gotcha ability, we need to make sure that the monster's appearance or nature somehow offers obvious cues as to the potential Gotcha so that players feel like they've got a fair chance to see it coming and not blunder into triggering it.

It's essential that the players have enough information to make smart decisions.

Chapter 3: Combat Encounters

I often don't use a DM screen when I'm running a game session—it's just a barrier between me and the battle grid, which is where the action is. There are two things, though, that make me look forward to getting my hands on a 4th Edition DM screen: First is the awesome art, and second is the table that appears on page 42 of the *DMG:* Difficulty Class and Damage by Level. Having that table easily accessible in front of me might mean that I never again have to open a rulebook in the middle of the game. It's possible I'm overstating the case, but that table does excite me.

Summed up in the ten rows of that table are both the math that makes 4th Edition *work* as D&D has never quite worked before, and a significant shift in philosophy that's reflected throughout the game.

One of our goals in designing 4th Edition was to extend the "sweet spot" across all 30 levels of play. There's a general sense among 3rd Edition players that the game hits a sweet spot around level 5 and stays good up to level 12 or so. Below level 5, characters are too fragile, and above level 12 they're too complicated. But I contend that another reason for that sweet spot is that, utterly by coincidence, that's the range of levels where a mostly arbitrary system of damage, hit points, and attack and saving throw numbers align to make the game work reasonably well. One of the ways we extended the sweet spot across all 30 levels was by replacing that arbitrary math with a system that's consistent and coherent throughout the whole game.

And some of that math is reflected on this table. We have a pretty good idea what character ability scores look like across 30 levels. Every character uses the same progression of attack and defense bonuses. We have targets for monster attack and defense numbers, based on what we have found is a good hit rate for character and monster attacks. And we've done the same math for character and monster hit points.

All that math lets us build a table showing target DCs and damage numbers for improvised challenges.

The shift in philosophy reflected in this table is most evident in the section on terrain in Chapter 4 (pages 67–68). In past editions, we'd describe things like cave slime as if the DC of the Acrobatics check to avoid slipping in it were an objective, scientific measurement of its physical properties. "How slippery is cave slime? It's DC 30 slippery." But setting a fixed number like that limits its usefulness—cave slime would be too challenging for low-level characters and irrelevant for high-level characters. In 4th Edition, we tell you to set the DC to avoid slipping based on the level of the characters, using the Difficulty Class and Damage by Level table. So when 5th-level characters encounter cave slime, they'll be making a check against DC 22, but 25th-level characters have to make a DC 33 check.

Does that mean that high-level characters encounter Epic Cave Slime that's objectively slipperier than the Heroic Cave Slime they encountered in their early careers? Maybe. It doesn't matter. What matters is that the DM has permission to use terrain that's relevant to the characters, regardless of their level—and has a table supported by solid math to make sure it's relevant.

Chapter 4: Building Encounters

This chapter gets to the heart of a significant philosophical shift in 4th Edition—a model of encounter design that emphasizes multiple threats rather than single monsters—and it took shape years before most of the rest of the book. During the editing stage, though, it got a significant overhaul, illustrating the importance of a good editor (Julia Martin, in this case) in making sure that information is presented in the most useful and helpful way.

When I sent Chapter 4 to Julia, it included six pages on the basics of assembling a group of monsters to make an encounter. First were two pages on "basic encounter building," then two pages of encounter templates (not too different than what's still on pages 58–59), and then two pages on "advanced encounters." Julia's observation was that the so-called advanced encounter-building was easier to explain and easier to understand than what we had presented as basic—because it boils down to shopping with a budget. With a simple, easy-to-grasp metaphor like that, it became much easier to explain what had seemed like a more complicated method of putting encounters together.

Our old "simple method" started with the basic conceptual model for a 4th Edition encounter: X characters of level Y should face an encounter with X monsters of level Y. That is, actually, the easiest way to build an encounter—pick the right number of monsters of the right level. But it suddenly gets a lot more complicated if you want to use monsters that aren't the same level as the characters, or you want to use more or fewer monsters, or you want to build an encounter that's more or less challenging than the baseline.

The "shopping" method, explained on pages 56–57, makes all of that a lot easier. It leads off with the idea of encounter level, as distinct from character level, so you can easily construct an encounter that's more or less difficult than standard. It tells you how to set your shopping budget, and then gives you guidelines for spending that budget.

Hopefully, the result of Julia's insight is a system that's easy to understand at a glance and easy to use when preparing for a game.

Chapter 5: Noncombat Encounters

When I was working on this book, I realized a strange little paradox about myself: I claimed that I didn't like puzzles in my D&D games, and yet I love doing puzzles in my free time. I think I got soured on puzzles in D&D when I played in a game a couple of years ago that was just one puzzle after another . . . and I was playing an illiterate halfling barbarian.

I turned out to really enjoy writing the section on puzzles that appears on pages 81–84. I included a "get a clue check" mechanic that DMs can use to appease players whose high-Intelligence characters should be better at puzzles than they are, and later Bill Slavicsek added (at Julia's suggestion, again), a way of treating puzzles as skill challenges. Combined with advice against overusing puzzles, those rules make me feel better about puzzles in my D&D games, and I've started using them more.

Incidentally, the material about creating riddles owes a great deal to an article by Mark Anthony in *Dragon* 175, and much of the rest of the advice for creating puzzles is drawn from a pair of *Dragon* articles by Mike Selinker, who were inadvertently omitted from the credits.

There's also a puzzle in the art for this book, in the sample handout on page 24. It relies on the ability to transcribe Dwarven runes, or else great skill at cryptograms. Can you solve it?

Chapter 6: Adventures

The key lesson from Chapter 6 is this: I am not the expert.

The 3rd Edition *Dungeonscape* book included an extensive—one might say exhaustive—discussion of adventure setting, detailing the many kinds of dungeon rooms and features. Our first inclination in putting this section of the *DMG* together was to draw on that excellent material. Ultimately, though, I decided that it lacked focus, and it was too much information for the first *DMG*. So I decided to go ask the best DM I know for some advice on crafting a dungeon setting. Besides being my manager, Chris Perkins is a past editor-in-chief of *Dungeon*, he runs two weekly D&D games

renowned for their depth of story and fast-paced thrills, and he has an astonishing ability to come up with cool stuff on the spur of the moment.

Chris's advice is directly responsible for the section on setting "personality" in this chapter (pages 108-109). It's a difficult concept to describe—*Dungeonscape* describes it as "theme," and I also use the words "feel" and "flavor" a lot. It's largely about intangibles and minor details, the things that make the Vault of the Drow feel different from the dwarf-built Forge of Fury or the Hall of the Fire Giant King.

So the lesson I took from Chris's desk back to the *DMG* is that finding the feel of your dungeon is more important than making sure each room has a clear purpose in its original construction. So Setting Personality is the focus of a two-page discussion, while that exhaustive catalog of dungeon rooms appears in a distilled form as the short list on page 110.

Chapter 7: Rewards

Great Moment in 4th Edition Design: In a conference room sometime in September 2007, Mike Mearls finally managed to communicate a dramatic insight to me and Rob Heinsoo. In effect, he said, we should separate treasure rewards from encounters.

A multitude of problems dissolved into nothingness at that moment. The rewards chapter became a cinch to write. Since we were starting from an idea of how much treasure we wanted characters to acquire over the course of a level, we just presented that—rather than going through contortions to create tables that would randomly generate an approximation of that over the course of a typical array of encounters.

See, in 3rd Edition we know how much treasure we expect characters to acquire over the course of a level—it's on a table in the *DMG*, page 54 (version 3.5). But let's say I'm building 13-1/3 encounters for my 5th-level party. Each one will have an average treasure of 1,600 gp—but the ochre jelly won't have any treasure, the young black dragon will have a randomly-generated treasure worth 4,800 gp on average (triple standard), and the 5th-level NPC bard will have 4,300 gp worth of gear (skewing heavily toward magic items that the characters will sell at half value). I have to put those encounters together and keep track of both how much XP I'm giving out and how much treasure—or else just do what most DMs do, trust that it's all going to balance out, and end up with characters that are under-equipped (nine times out of ten) for their level.

. . . finding the feel of your dungeon is more important than making sure each room has a clear purpose in its original construction.

When I build eight to ten encounters for my 5th-level 4th Edition game, I build the encounters, and then go back over them and dole out the treasure. I start with the list of treasure parcels I'm going to give out, and it's up to me whether to skip over the ochre jelly or put two parcels in the room it occupies. I could put six parcels in the dragon's hoard. The NPC bard can have a single magic item, actually above his level and therefore useful to the PCs, which I'll cross off the list of parcels. And some of the treasure can be outside the dungeon, in quest rewards.

The treasure parcels presented on pages 126-129 are the final development of Mike's essential insight. They're perhaps my favorite aspect of adventure design in the new edition.

Chapter 8: Campaigns

There's a subtle but really important philosophy change reflected in this chapter. Compare these statements from DMGs past and present:

"What lies ahead will require the use of all your skill, put a strain on your imagination, bring your creativity to the fore, test your patience, and exhaust your free time."—1979

"Creating a campaign of your own is the most difficult, but most rewarding, task a DM faces."—2000

"Planning an entire campaign seems a daunting task, but don't worry—you don't have to plot out every detail right from the start. You can start off with the basics, running a few adventures (whether published or those you design yourself), and later think about larger plotlines you want to explore. You're free to add as much or as little detail as you wish."—2008

I mean no disrespect at all to the many DMs who do devote countless hours to building their campaigns, sacrificing their free time to give their players a rewarding experience. But one of the goals of this DMG was to help more players move behind the DM screen, and telling them up front that being a DM requires loads of work runs counter to that goal. I ran a long-running "campaign" at lunch hours here in the office that was nothing but one random dungeon after another, and I believe that's a perfectly viable campaign model for DMs who don't have free time to spare. Instead of leading off with dire warnings about how much hard work lies ahead, I chose in this chapter to emphasize the simple truth that being a DM rewards as much work as you want to put into it, whether that's an hour of prep time before each week's adventure or several months spent planning out a detailed campaign.

Chapter 9: The World

One of the topics that drew a lot of debate through the course of 4th Edition design and development was the economy of magic items, which is summed up on page 155. There are some folks, both in the department and among the community of players at large, who are dead-set against the idea of magic item shops where characters can stroll in and buy a +5 holy avenger off the shelf, and others who argue just as fervently that such shops are essential to the function of the game.

The fact that magic items appear in the *Player's Handbook* in this edition of the game reflects the triumph of the viewpoint that these items are fundamentally under player control. Characters need something to spend their gold on, and we want characters to be able to equip themselves with the items they consider necessary and important to their identity, just as they choose their own feats and powers. So that part of the economy was never really up for debate.

What was debated quite a lot was the question of how characters translate gold into items—and vice versa. The solution we ended up with is sort of a compromise, but I think it's an elegant one. The natural cycle looks like this:

- Characters find magic items as treasure. Most of these, they keep and use.
- Sometimes characters get rid of old items they don't need any more, or they decide not to keep an item they find. Usually, they sell these to interested buyers. As an alternative, they can use the Disenchant Magic Item ritual to create residuum.
- Characters use the Enchant Magic Item ritual to create items they want. Alternatively, they can buy items, with the question of who they buy the item from entirely up to the DM's discretion.

DMs who don't like magic item shops can take the buying and selling out of that cycle without altering the economy significantly. DMs who prefer magic item shops can do thr reverse, if they choose.

Chapter 10: The DM's Toolbox

We knew very early on that designing NPCs for 4th Edition had to be easier than it was in 3rd Edition. If we failed in that, our editors would revolt, and our DMs wouldn't be far behind!

In 3rd Edition, NPCs were part of a tangled mess of rules that wreaked havoc with the economy of the game, among other things. DMs would put hours into designing NPCs with a lifespan at the table of about an hour. They weren't as tough as their CR indicated, and in order to get even close they had to carry as much treasure as a dragon of their level. In campaigns that featured a lot of combat against NPC opponents, characters got a lot more treasure than they deserved for the challenge they faced. Worst of all (and I'm speaking as the designer of *City of the Spider Queen,* here), there was a whole type of monsters that you just couldn't use unless you were willing to do that work.

Now, NPCs are a lot like monsters—and the *Monster Manual* includes monsters like drow, hobgoblins, and (gasp!) humans that aren't built as PCs. When you build an NPC, you don't go through all the steps of building a player character, and you don't necessarily use the same rules. The result is a balanced opponent—and one that needn't be carrying a single magic item, unless you want to give him one (and mark it off your list of treasure parcels!).

This whole chapter, to me, showcases the elegance of the new system and the joy it is to design for. Advancing a monster? Could hardly be easier. Making a troll fighter? Easy as pie—and you don't even have to change the troll's level. Want a spellcasting dragon? No problem. Applying a template? The design goal for the templates in this chapter was that the changes to the base creature should fit on a sticky note you could put in your *Monster Manual* as you run the creature from the book.

When I was at D&D Experience last month, a player talked to me about the process of creating NPCs for 4th Edition. "Say," he suggested, "the characters start a fight with the bartender, and I want the bartender to be an 8th-level fighter. How hard is it for me to make up his stats?"

Here's what I'd do—and what I did, to demonstrate how easy it was. Open the *Monster Manual* to the Human entry (page 163). Take the human berserker, a level 4 brute. Turn to the *DMG* (page 174), and advance him to 8th level. He'll get a +4 on attacks and defenses, +2 damage, and (flip to page 184) 40 hit points. We want a fighter, so we'll give him one fighter encounter power (turn to page 80 of the *Player's Handbook*)—let's say *reckless strike,* since that feels very appropriate for our brute. Done.

Took me 2 minutes.

And that's our whirlwind tour of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. I left out Chapter 11, ably written by Rich Baker with assistance from Mike Mearls. But it's my hope that, along the way, you've gained some understanding into the design process that brought this book together, the philosophy that underlies it, and the way that the game has evolved with this edition.

About the Author

James Wyatt is the Lead Story Designer for D&D and one of the lead designers of D&D 4th Edition. In over seven years at Wizards of the Coast, he has authored or co-authored award-winning adventures and settings including the *Eberron Campaign Setting, City of the Spider Queen,* and *Oriental Adventures*. His more recent works include *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft, Cormyr: The Tearing of the Weave,* and *The Forge of War*. He is also the author of several novels set in Eberron.

The Secret Lives of Dungeon Masters, Part 2

by Shelly Mazzanoble

I just got back from the International Reading Association annual convention in Atlanta. I really do have a real job at Wizards that has nothing to do with playing D&D and writing about girls who play D&D. For those of you who aren't familiar with the reading strategies of five-year-olds or children's literature, let me explain. IRA (I know . . . unfortunate acronym) is a gathering of nearly 18,000 teachers, administrators, researchers—just about anyone dedicated to teaching others to read.

I haven't talked to many principals and teachers since sixth grade when I declared war on Stacy Kendrick, and I still get shivers down my spine in the presence of academic authority. I kept wanting to shout, "She asked for it!" But no one was planning to stick my belligerent butt in detention (and she really did ask for it).

At IRA, these principals were attending for the sole purpose of educating themselves on how to best educate others. They want to learn about new books, meet authors, and gather up handouts and stickers to take back to use in their schools. (They also want vast quantities of red wine and are willing to listen to whatever you're saying if they've got a glass in their hand.) They'll take anything they can carry—but not so they can rush back to the hotel and put it all up on eBay. It makes me sad to think of my teachers emptying their checking accounts so they can schlep around a convention center in the pursuit of some great new book that would awaken my imagination and take me on some great new adventure. (And maybe less of a Stacy Kendrick hater in the process.)

It was here I began to realize there are certain similarities between teachers and Dungeon Masters.

Back at Wizards of the Coast, renowned Dungeon Master and scribe of the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide,* James Wyatt, (minus the sweaty brow and flashing pin on his lapel proclaiming him a Reading Diva,) was eager to help me become a better Dungeon Master. He was already waiting for me in a conference room called Waterdeep, reclining in a chair with a grande white chocolate mocha within arm's reach. *Odd,* I think, flashing back to the research data I collected while stalking—er—looking for him. *It's not even 11:24 yet.* Jane Goodall I am not.

"Thanks for meeting with me, James," I tell him, dropping a contraband printout of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* on the table. The impact rattles the contents of his recycled cup. I can hear the white chocolately coffee slosh against the sides.

"Sorry," I tell him, even though it's kind of his fault. If he didn't write so darn much, this printout wouldn't weigh 30 pounds.

It only took James nine weeks to write the *Dungeon Master's Guide. Including over the holidays.* It can take me longer than that to empty my dishwasher. Remember James has a full-time job. And a family. And he writes novels. The man is a machine. Perhaps he has a minion.

He's also incredibly modest. "Why me?" he asks. "I don't think I can help you."

It occurs to me that maybe *my* reputation has preceded *me* and while he could help most people, he can't help me specifically. Maybe New DM got to him first.

James has a reputation for being one of the best DMs in the building, which is like being one of the best hockey players in Moose Jaw. It means something. In fact, it's James's experience DMing for unruly kids and adolescents that made him a viable candidate to take over our group after Teddy left. And I tell him so.

"Wow," he says, half smiling, half grimacing. "That's quite an . . . honor."

Yep. He's definitely been talking to New DM.

In the past we'd have to weasel information about the health of the monsters from Teddy. What the heck? Are they insured by Aetna too?

We get down to business. I tell James what my mission is, how I've had a bad experience DMing before, how I'm chock full of anxiety thinking my friends won't have a good time. How New DM is forcing me to do this as some kind of atonement even though I'd rather plant trees or pick up litter from the side of I-5.

"I don't want to suck at it," I tell him. "Is that normal?"

"Completely," he says. "But if you go into it with the right attitude you won't. Everyone is there to have fun, including the Dungeon Master."

I ask James what's the best change 4th Edition brings.

"Monster design," says without hesitation. "Fights aren't over so quickly anymore because monsters are designed to last at least 2 rounds, instead of wham, bam, hit the pavement."

This is a change I've seen firsthand, as everyone at our table always seems to get a whack at a beast at least a couple of times, regardless of their initiative roll.

James goes on to say 4th Edition monsters aren't plagued with abilities they never use. "Stat blocks are streamlined. It may seem like monsters have less powers, but really they're more usable powers."

"Kind of like trading Pig Latin for Spanish, or your ability to flip your eyelids inside out for the capability to lay tile." I ask.

"Kind of . . . " he says.

Because monster mashing is streamlined, DMs don't have to keep track of so much unnecessary info, which means they can invite a wide array of monsters to the party. *Uh oh*, I think. But wait! I'm hearing this as a DM, not a player. This is all good news. Especially for the new Dungeon Master.

"Because the rules run more smoothly," James continues, "Play moves quicker around the table."

One thing I appreciate is the term "bloodied"—the verbal detection that gives you an idea how badly you pummeled a monster, and vice versa. In the past we'd have to weasel information about the health of the monsters from Teddy. What the heck? Are they insured by Aetna too? How about some basic health-care updates? We'd be sweating over our swords and *fireballs*, and all Teddy would tell us was, "That hits. You do damage. Next?"

"Come on, Teddy," I say. "How much did that hurt?"

"Oh, it hit pretty good," he would say.

"Like, what did the monster say when he saw the *fireball* coming at him?" Adam would ask.

"Oh, he was pissed," Teddy would answer.

It was difficult to keep track of the pissed off monsters and the really pissed off monsters. Now New DM tells us someone is bloodied and we know we're more than halfway to defeating it.

I ask James for some tips on DMing. He laughs off my question (again) telling me there are tons of others within 5 feet of us who could answer that better.

"I don't see their name on this book," I say and that seems to appease him. This is no time for modesty, James Wyatt. But it might be time for another round of white chocolate mochas. Out with it.

So if you were an amateur Dungeon Master who happened to trap James in a conference room and bribe him with fancy coffee drinks, here's what he'd probably advise you to do:

Play to your Group. If they're a bunch of maniacs looking to slice and dice everything in their path, don't spend the first 45 minutes getting to know NPCs. Get to the killing.

Prepare. This may seem like a big duh, but James suggests imagining how each encounter will go before the game. This will make running it smoother. And use dungeon tiles! No one wants to wait while you spend 2 hours drawing squares with a Sharpie. Fudge. Yum! But not that kind of fudge. Did you know some DMs actually misrepresent die rolls? You did? I didn't. James doesn't use a screen, so his players know exactly what's going on. But for some reason it never occurred to me that other DMs might have more than just a die-tossing hand in our fate.

"I only fudge when I'm playing with kids," James explains. "I *might* let their characters live an extra round."

Hmm . . . I wonder how many times Teddy may have fudged an attack on Astrid?

Get all Dr. Phil on their Asses. No one likes a smart ass. And no one *especially* likes a know-it-all pseudo-shrink. But sometimes we need one, don't we? If your players get surly, remind them we're all there to have to have fun and you're just trying to tell a story. They're supposed to be friends—at least in the game. What happens in the parking lot is their business.

Get all Mrs. Sortman on their Asses. Mrs. Sortman was my kindergarten teacher, and she thought there was something unique about all of us. The same is true for PCs. 4th Edition gives every character a little something extra. James really likes to play that up and incorporate backstories into the game. New DM does this too, and I love it. For one thing, it helps explain why a bear in a fez and tutu is always following Tabitha around. And should anyone rat out a fellow adventurer, they'll have to spend the rest of the game with the tattle-tail pinned to their butts. Mrs. Sortman hated turncoats. Almost as much as I hate know-it-all pseudo-shrinks.

Before I let James go back to work I ask one more question. Not just as a DM, but as a PC.

"How do you decide who a monster is going to attack?" Or, *how much does revenge play into a game?*

"First, are the monsters marked? If yes, whoever marked the monster gets it."

I just love it when the fighters and paladins mark the bad guys. I feel like a reality show contestant who gets to stay on the island one more week.

"If not, it may depend on who's closest, who's already beat up pretty bad, or who's in your line of sight."

"That's it?" I ask.

"Or who pissed you off. That matters too."

Great. Remind me to leave New DM a booster pack of *Against the Giants* before our next game.

The first thing I do when I get back to my desk is write an email to Teddy asking if he is of the "Save their characters, save their sanity" school of thought. He responded right away.

Are you crazy? I love TPK! In fact, there was one room in the jungle temple in Xen'drik where Astrid came THIS CLOSE to dying. I wanted you all to get the broadest exposure to D&D, and that included watching your characters die.

No! Not the jungle room! No one is supposed to talk about the jungle room! *Go to your happy place. Go! Happy place . . . warm shoes. The walls are made of mint chocolate chip ice cream. Look over there! A puppy!*

I'm not planning to force anyone to watch their characters die. That seems a little Rob Zombie-movie for me. This is supposed to be fun, damnit!

I picture myself as Julie McCoy on the U.S.S. Sembia. The Dungeon Master is the universe's purser, guiding her players through lido decks, short buffet lines, shuffleboard, and oh yeah, some skill-honed monsters. In fact, I think I might have just come up with my own campaign.

My return flight from Atlanta was the perfect place to get some studying done. Want to know the best way to ensure your airline seatmate won't get all chatty on you? Make a big production out of yanking your 30-pound confidential print-out of the *DMG* from your carry-on bag (drop a few protein bars and bags of Swedish Fish in the process) and deposit that sucker on your tray table. Then leave it there in full view why you hit up the flight attendants for more cookies.

Upon returning to my seat, the conservatively dressed woman in 34E shot me a tsk-tsk look and didn't wipe that scowl off her mug for the next 1,500 miles. What did 34E think the *Dungeon Master's Guide* was about? Oh. Right. I get it . . . .

After a quick review of Chapter 1 (How to Be a Dungeon Master) I move on to the adventure New DM suggested, *Escape from Sembia*. I've never read through an adventure before, just in case Teddy or New DM chose to run it for our group. It's a fascinating exercise as I see the tale unfold before me, and I can't help but picture how my group will react in these scenarios. In this adventure there are fruit carts manned by merchants who flee at the first sign of combat. If the PCs tip over the cart, then the squares filled with fruit become difficult terrain. Interesting. Tabitha needs to start using the resources New DM gives us and quit wasting those *fireballs*. Perhaps this exercise won't just make me a better DM. I might learn a thing or two about being a better player. Perhaps I'll nudge the drink cart as it passes by on the plane just to see what happens.

Halfway through the adventure I get really into it. I notice my lips are moving and I'm giving voice to words like *dagger* and *brandish*. My fist crashes down on my tray table after a particularly exciting encounter. 34E is really freaking out now, squirming in her seat and trying to use her bodice-ripping romance novel as a shield. Maybe I can work her into the story somehow. Maybe she's running a puppy mill deep in the hills of Sembia and my adventurers have been summoned to shut it down. A puppy mill! When 34E asks me to get up so she can use the lavatory, I glare at her.

"Why don't you give me an Athletics check?" I tell her. Well, in my mind at least...

Yes, I might be able to get into this Dungeon Mastering thing after all.

It's cool being on this side of the fence. I feel like I'm getting a private tour of how my favorite beer is made. It doesn't take away from the flavor. Quite the contrary. I appreciate it all the more knowing how much work went into the amber goodness in my pint glass. Cheers to you, Dungeon Masters!

Now, about that menu . . .

About the Author

Shelly is no longer afraid of principals. Flight attendants are the new enemy. (And Stacy Kendrick.)

The Evolution of Shared-World Campaigns in the RPGA

Part 4: The 3rd Edition Era

by Chris Tulach

In the previous articles in this series, we've discussed the origins of shared-world campaigns and their impact throughout the end of the 20th Century. In 2000, Wizards of the Coast launched the then-newest edition of D&D, 3rd Edition. Alongside the launch of the new game came a campaign that took the Living system to new heights—Living Greyhawk.

Living Greyhawk first came into the public eye in 1999, a few months before 3rd Edition was formally announced. Building on the success of Living City, the campaign was designed to be administered at a local level by regional volunteers called "Triads" who reported to contracted administrators known collectively as "The Circle". The world was broken into these regions, and each region was assigned a World of Greyhawk region to administer.

For over a year, the new campaign staff worked diligently on preparing the campaign for launch at Gen Con 2000, the same place that 3rd Edition would be unveiled to the world. On a hot August weekend in Milwaukee, players converged on the venerable show to get their first experience of 3rd Edition and the future of the RPGA. On Friday at the show, Living Greyhawk play commenced.

It was a runaway hit. Soon after the show, regional adventures started showing up in local areas. Many players hungrily devoured whatever adventures they could get their hands on—driving long distances and flying when the drive was too much. Many adventures for Living Greyhawk were exclusive to regions, meaning that if you wanted to play a regional adventure, you needed to travel to that location.

Documentation of character rewards underwent a radical shift after the first year of the campaign; certificates were removed in favor of an access system given out through an adventure record. Removal of certificates quelled one of the longstanding problems of the granddaddy campaign, Living City. No longer did players have to argue who received what item or "dice off" to randomly determine which character would get a certain piece of treasure. While there was some resistance to the removal of certificates at first, the campaign continued to grow at a breakneck pace. Membership in the RPGA was now free, and home play was beginning to be recognized, leading to tremendous growth in the player base. Tens of thousands of people were playing D&D in the RPGA.

By the early 2000s, Living Greyhawk had achieved a first for a shared-world D&D campaign—it had a critical mass of players in the United States and several other countries. This meant that as long as you lived in a community with a sizable D&D gamer population, it was

very likely you could get a group together to play Living Greyhawk or hold a modest-sized game day. The accessibility of the internet greatly contributed to its growth. Dozens of message boards and mailing lists helped to keep gamers in contact with one another and informed about Living Greyhawk events.

Living Greyhawk catered to the experienced, involved gamer. If you were very involved, it also helped if you had the means to travel often. A number of players went to a new Living Greyhawk event (like a convention or game day) almost once a week, driving anywhere within easy distance and flying around the globe when possible.

Now the RPGA has reached the end of its 3rd Edition days, and is beginning a new chapter in its existence with 4th Edition.

While Living Greyhawk was a great success, it was not without its organizational problems. The regional system, while great for creating an involved player base, lived and died by the work of the volunteer triads and its real-world geography. If a region had a very productive and responsive group of administrators, play flourished. Occasionally, some regions were less productive, and players from those regions that could not travel far did not enjoy the play opportunities that others from well-staffed regions with close neighboring regions enjoyed. Adventures were seeing only a fraction of the possible play with the regional restrictions.

The magic item access system for Living Greyhawk, while serviceable and a good replacement for certificates, also had problems. Characters with eclectic builds might never find that capstone magic item for their character, and access was sometimes uneven. Adventure records took up a large amount of space in a character binder and looked pretty intimidating to a new (and sometimes existing) player, leading to the moniker "Living Accounting."

With the success of Living Greyhawk, another program was created to support play in local shops and to appeal to a more casual gamer. In 2003, the RPGA decided to launch the shared-world program called **D&D Campaigns**. Its initial offering was Legacy of the Green Regent, set in the Forgotten Realms. Soon after, the program featured campaigns set in the new world of Eberron, including Mark of Heroes and Xen'drik Expeditions.

While Living Greyhawk targeted continued, regular play, D&D Campaigns focused on tight storylines in a contained, two-year campaign. To keep play manageable for casual gamers, the program features a "level kick" semiannually to bring the base character levels to a higher minimum. This allowed adventures to be more focused and solved many problems with getting a group together to play at a table (called "mustering").

Legacy of the Green Regent (and the Eberron campaigns that followed it) also used an online character tracking system to house all character data. In theory, this would make it easy for a player to store a character's history and rewards—just log in, print out your information, and bring it to your next game session. In practice, there were many technical issues with the system that needed smoothing out. Despite bumps in the road, the D&D Campaigns programs were also a success, eclipsing all other campaigns except Living Greyhawk in total players and activity.

Xen'drik Expeditions, launched in 2006, expanded on the D&D Campaigns model by introducing story-based factions that determined what adventures a character could play. Each faction had a series of faction-only adventures as well as adventures where the factions could mix and match, called Expedition adventures. It was also the first shared-world D&D campaign to allow players to play evil characters, albeit in a controlled environment.

Now the RPGA has reached the end of its 3rd Edition days, and is beginning a new chapter in its existence with 4th Edition. At Origins 2008, the finale adventures for Living Greyhawk and Xen'drik Expeditions will take place, marking the close of the 3rd Edition era for the RPGA while a new campaign looms large on the horizon—Living Forgotten Realms. Next time, we'll talk about the future of shared-world D&D in the RPGA as we prepare you for the launch of Living Forgotten Realms in August 2008!

About the Author

Originally thought to have been raised from a humble Midwestern family, Chris Tulach actually fell to Earth in a meteorite-shaped capsule flung from a planet far outside our galaxy. While under the yellow rays of Sol, Chris's nerdity far surpasses that of any normal human. Using this precious gift only for good, he has recently become the RPGA Content Manager, responsible for the development and deployment of Dungeons & Dragons organized play programs.

Closer, Closer . . .

by Bill Slavicsek

Last month, the release of *H1: Keep on the Shadowfell*, which includes *D&D 4th Edition Quick-Start Rules* and ready-to-play characters was a big success. Even though we moved the release date of the *Player's Handbook* to June so that we could release all three core rulebooks at the same time, we still wanted to get people playing 4E in May. With the early release of the adventure, we were able to accomplish that.

As I write these words, we're in the final week of the build-up to the D&D Day, June 6th, when the core rulebooks hit the shelves. Yes, there has been at least one minor slip up by one outlet, and a few books got out early, but in general it looks like most distributors and retailers are holding up to their end of the agreement. We're really looking forward to an amazing rush of eager gamers heading out on Friday, and then participating in one of the many Game Days taking place on Saturday. Check out the links to find a location near you.

This week also sees the start of the roll out of our first full-on 4th Edition issues of *Dragon* and *Dungeon Magazines*. I love the updated look of the online magazines, the great content, and the new possibilities that fully tying the physical products to the digital content opens up for all D&D enthusiasts. The ride starts here, and it's going to be exciting!

Digital Horizon

What else is on tap for D&D Insider? Last time, we discussed what was going to be available during the free beta period, including the online magazine content and the *D&D Rules Compendium*. Now I want to give you a preview about what else we're going to be rolling out in the months to come.

The *D&D Character Builder* application lets you create a D&D character, manage that character, print a character sheet, and save different versions of that character as you experiment with the various options and build concepts. Once you use this program to create a character, you'll never want to use any other method. Plus, it works directly with the *D&D Rules Compendium*, so you know you're always pulling from the latest rules material available.

A related but separate application, the *D&D Character Visualizer*, allows you to give visual form and substance to the character you created with the *Builder*. No more stick figures or cut-out illustrations for you! With this program, you can customize the look of your character, save it, print it, wallpaper it, and take it to your game to show everyone exactly what your character looks like. Choose your race, gender, armor and weapon sets, hair color, eye color, skin color, and more. We've been playing with this application around the office, and it's so fun to make cool-looking characters that we're all looking for additional games to play in just so we can use them!

The last application I want to preview today is the *D&D Game Table*. We've been showing this off at conventions and to the press these past few months, and it gets better and better each time I see a new build. This application will really fulfill our promise of D&D play 24/7, because with this you can play private games with your selected gaming friends, or you can look for an open game and play whenever one is available. This application provides all the things you would have at your physical kitchen table—including dungeon tiles, dice, miniatures, maps, and voice chat—so that you can play D&D over the Internet. I see this application being used in multiple ways. I see it as a way for old gaming groups, scattered to the four winds, to get back together to play. I see it as a way for D&D fans without a regular gaming group to get to play whenever they want. I see it as a way to expand your D&D play, adding online games to the games you play with your face-to-face group. I see it used as an enhancement to face-to-face play, with elements of the *Game Table* getting projected onto the wall or the table for everyone in the room to see. And I even see it being used by people playing other game systems, because it will be a great tool for playing any roleplaying game over the Internet.

As these applications become available, we'll roll them out for you to try. More information on these as the summer rolls on.

Start Playing!

This is it! Five more days (from the time I write this), and the *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual* will be available. I hope you have a gaming group all ready to go. I'm even starting up a second new group this week myself, because just one night of D&D isn't enough. If you haven't ever taken up the mantle of the Dungeon Master, now is probably the best time to do so. We've made DMing easier than ever with 4th Edition, and I hope that inspires a new generation of DMs to arise and set out to create new worlds of action and adventure. I think I'll pick up with that topic next time. Until then, I've got to go and get ready for D&D Game Day!